DANTE

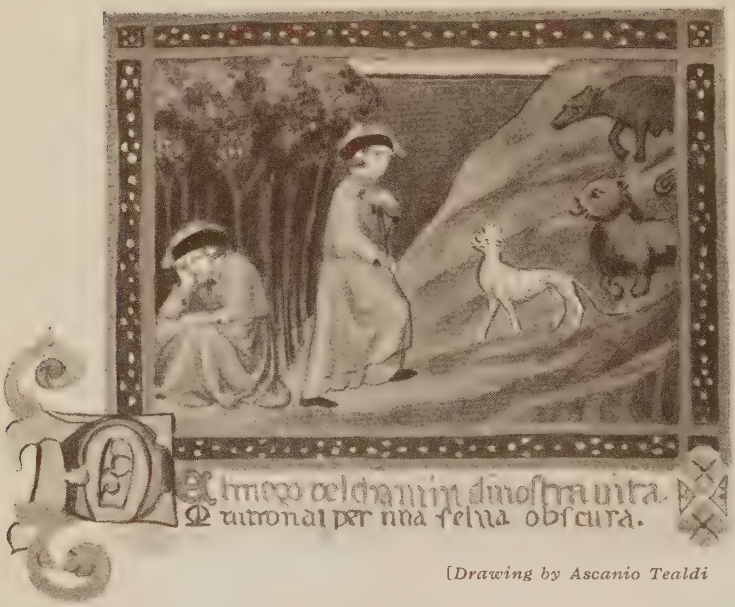
THE MAN AND THE POET

MARY BRADFORD WHITING

LIBRARY
MANCHESTER COLLEGE

LIBRARY
MANCHESTER COLLEGE

DANTE



[*Drawing by Ascanio Tealdi*

From a 14th Century MS. of the *Divina Commedia* in the Laurentian Library, Florence.

DANTE THE MAN AND THE POET

by

MARY BRADFORD WHITING

with sixteen illustrations by
ASCANIO TEALDI.

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK - MCMXXIII

Note.

The translation of the *Divina Commedia* is in almost every case that of Cary. Other translations are noted as they occur. The translation of the *Vita Nuova* is that of D. G. Rossetti.

Printed in Great Britain.

D236 w
c.2

Preface.

ANOTHER book on the life and works of Dante may be thought superfluous in view of the vast number already existent. But while ample provision has been made for scholars and students, there seems to be room for a Life which in small and convenient compass may give the general reader a connected account of the poet's career and a brief description of his writings.

The recent Sixth Centenary Celebrations have greatly quickened public interest in Dante, and the author's aim has been to write for those who are attracted by the Man and the Poet, but have neither time nor inclination to go into all those technical and controversial matters which make up so large a part of the literature concerning him.

It is for this reason that the story of Dante's life has been drawn from the pages of his contemporary, Boccaccio, and from the other ancient Chroniclers. Modern research has thrown doubt upon some of their statements, and the critics have been busy with the Dante "legend," one of the latest theories being that there was another Dante Alighieri in Florence during his time, and that some of the statements in the City Records which have been supposed to refer to the poet concern this second Dante.

It has, however, not infrequently happened, that a so-called "legend"—whether connected with Dante or any other great figure in the world's history—upon which doubt has been cast by research, has been re-established by later discoveries; and since Boccaccio, the first public lecturer on Dante, was born during his

20236

lifetime, and had the advantage of personal acquaintance with his daughter and his nephew, it is probable that his account is mainly correct.

In any case we have in the pages of these old Chroniclers the story of Dante's life and the conception of his personality current in the years immediately succeeding his death, and as such it cannot fail to interest all those who reverence the poet and who love the beautiful city which in these last days has so nobly honoured the son whom once she spurned from her gates.

Contents.

PART I.

Page

STUDENT, LOVER AND STATESMAN - - 1

"I felt a spirit of Love begin to stir."—*Vita Nuova.*

PART II.

EXILE AND WANDERER - - - - - 71

"Yea, thou shalt learn how salt his food who fares
Upon another's bread, how steep his path
Who treadeth up and down another's stairs."
Paradiso. Canto 17.

PART III.

POET AND SEER - - - - - - 125

"His will is our peace."—*Paradiso.* Canto 3.

List of Illustrations.

Frontispiece

1.	Dante's Birthplace - - -	*to face page*		6
2.	Courtyard of the Portinari Palace	,,	,,	10
3.	Fresco Portrait of Dante - -	,,	,,	18
4.	Door of the Church of San Martino	,,	,,	41
5.	Interior of the Church of San Martino - - - - - -	,,	,,	46
6.	Courtyard of the Bargello -	,,	,,	53
7.	Chapel of the Bargello - -	,,	,,	64
8.	The Giusti Gardens, Verona -	,,	,,	71
9.	Cloisters of the Church of San Zeno, Verona - - - -	,,	,,	94
10.	Doorway of the Church of San Zeno - - - - - -	,,	,,	103
11.	Courtyard of the Palace of Justice	,,	,,	108
12.	Fourteenth Century Portrait of Dante - - - - - -	,,	,,	125
13.	A Path of Pilgrimage - - -	,,	,,	140
14.	A Tuscan Ox-Cart - - -	,,	,,	156
15.	Medallion Portrait of Dante, 14th Century - - - - - -	,,	,,	175
16.	Reverse of the Medal - -	,,	,,	175

Part I.

Student, Lover, and Statesman.

"I felt a spirit of Love begin to stir."—*Vita Nuova.*

THE sea-wind blows through the pine forests of Ravenna, through the pine forests and over the deserted marshes where the ships of the Roman Navy once rode at anchor, and it was there—in that land which six hundred years ago was already the shrine of a half-forgotten past—that Dante looked forward to the future with firm and unfaltering faith and declared that in Florence alone would he accept the wreath due to the poet's temples.

That faith was not crowned with fulfilment while he lived, for the ban of exile lay over him to the end, and it was only when it was too late that Florence repented of her cruelty; but the wheel has come full circle at last, nowhere is he more honoured to-day than in his own beloved city, and nowhere is his triumph more fully recognised, even though his ashes still rest among those who gave him shelter.

It was in the month of May, 1265, that the child was born whose fame was steadily to increase with the passing of the ages until in this six hundredth century he is an object of world-wide reverence. Like all infant Florentines, he was carried to the Baptistery on the day of his birth, and there received the name of Durante, "the enduring one," a name prophetic of his lasting fame. It was, however, by its contraction—Dante—that the boy was known, and it is that name which has come down to us through the centuries.

The family of the Alighieri, into which he was born, was a well-known one in Florence. As Dante himself tells us, they were descended from Cacciaguida, a Florentine warrior and knight, who was born about 1090. His son was called by the name of Alighiero, or wing-bearer, from the arms borne by his mother's family, the Alighieri of Ferrara—a wing of gold upon a sky of azure—this name being taken by all his descendants in place of that of Cacciaguida. And if the name of Durante is descriptive of his enduring renown, the name of Alighieri is surely equally appropriate to the poet who soared on golden wings to the heaven beyond the stars.

The first Alighiero had a son named Bellincione, and it was his son, Alighiero di Bellincione—who was the father of the poet. This Alighiero was twice married, and it is generally believed that Monna Bella, the mother of the poet, was his first wife, and that she had no other children. Lapa, his stepmother, had at least three children, two daughters and a son named Francesco; one of these daughters was married to Leone Poggi, and had a son named Andrea, who was a friend of Boccaccio's, and who supplied him with details for his Life of Dante. It is to one of his step-sisters that Dante is supposed to allude in the *Vita Nuova*, when he speaks of "a young and very gentle lady" who watched beside him when he lay stricken with a grievous sickness.

The date of Alighiero's death is not known, but that he was no longer living in 1283 was proved by the discovery of a deed of sale in that year, in which Dante is spoken of as being the vendor *come herede del padre* (as his father's heir), an expression which points to the correctness of the statement that he was the son of the first marriage.

It is not easy for the modern visitor to Florence to wipe out from his mind all thoughts of the Medici and of the

glorious succession of painters, sculptors and architects, who produced such marvellous works under their sway, but if we would have any clear idea of what Dante's beloved city looked like in his day, we must first think away nearly all of those wonders of art which the mention of Florence instinctively calls up to our mental vision. It was not until the year 1285, twenty years after Dante was born, that what is known as the third *Cerchio*, or Circuit, of the walls, was planned by Arnolfo di Cambio. This *Cerchio* for the first time included a portion of the ground on the south side of the Arno; the Roman walls of the first *Cerchio* had only enclosed a short frontage on the river with the ground behind it, but in 1078 the city authorities decided that the whole of the population must be defended from possible besiegers, and a second *Cerchio* was therefore made, taking in the river frontage from the present Ponte alla Carraia to the Ponte alle Grazie, the walls stretching back to a greater distance than before so as to enclose all the existing houses. The palaces of the nobles were at this time distinguished by high towers, but since the citizens considered that this gave them an unfair advantage—not only in times of attack from outside, but also in internal feuds and factions—a decree was passed in the year 1250 that no tower should be allowed to be more than 90 feet high.

The third *Cerchio*, when completed, must have had a very fine effect, for the portions of the wall that still exist show its height and massive structure, and the towers with which its six miles of circumference were studded were finely battlemented; but since the work went on slowly, and was not completed until 1388, it was still in its early stages when Dante was exiled.

It may seem somewhat strange that at a time when there were few, if any, buildings of importance on the

south side of the river, four bridges should have been built at such a short distance from each other, but the explanation is probably to be found in the fact that Italy was subject to constant invasion from the north, and that Florence being thus liable to attacks in the rear, it was most necessary for her to keep up ample means of communication with Rome and the other southern powers. The first Ponte Vecchio was built by the Romans, and having been swept away by a flood, was rebuilt in 1177; this latter was the bridge known to Dante, but it was again destroyed after his death, and in 1333 a stronger bridge was built which has lasted to this day. The Ponte alla Carraia was built of wood in 1218, and was at first called the Ponte Nuovo, to distinguish it from the Ponte Vecchio; the district of Ognissanti (All Saints), which it was to serve, was chiefly inhabited by wool and silk merchants, who needed more facilities for getting their bales of merchandise across the river *en route* for Rome and other centres of trade. This bridge was destroyed by a flood in the year 1269, and was rebuilt of wood, but this time resting on stone piers; it was this second bridge that Dante knew, for it was not until 1304, two years after his exile, that the terrible catastrophe happened, of which Villani gives so vivid an account in his Chronicle.

The usual May-day revels were being held, and as a startling novelty, boats filled with actors were stationed on the river near the bridge, and a drama was enacted of lost souls being carried off to the fires of everlasting torment by demons. The citizens flocked to the bridge in such crowds to see the performance that it gave way under their weight, and they were plunged into the water, where great numbers were drowned. Although Dante had left Florence he must have heard the story in all its

details, and it may have perhaps supplied him with some of the imagery of the *Inferno*.

The Ponte alle Grazie was built in 1235, and was at first called the Ponte Rubaconte, from Rubaconte da Mandella, the Podestà, or Governor, who ruled Florence at that time; it has been repaired and widened, but the main structure is still the same as it was when Dante describes it in the *Purgatorio* (Canto XII.) as leading to the hill on whose brow stands the church—i.e. San Miniato. It was upon this bridge in the year 1283, when Dante was a lad of eighteen, that a treaty of peace was made between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines, a treaty only too soon broken.

The last of the four bridges to be built was the Ponte Santa Trinità; but the structure of 1252 was soon swept away, and in 1274, when Dante was only nine, a new bridge was begun; this lasted until 1557, when a flood destroyed it, and the present bridge was erected during the reign of the Grand Duke Cosimo I.

The central point of the city during the first centuries of its existence was the Baptistery, Dante's "*bel San Giovanni*"; but it was not as a Baptistery that it was first used, for its origin is lost in the mists of the ages and while some authorities state that it was built by the Romans as a temple of Mars, others assert that it dates still further back to the days of the Etruscans. However this may be, the octagon building with its sixteen columns and its paved floor was annexed by the Church and made into a cathedral. In Dante's time it was open to the sky, as the Pantheon at Rome is to this day, and the space surrounding it was a graveyard, belonging to the church of Santa Reparata, on the site of which the present cathedral stands. The work of casing it with black and white marble was not begun by Arnolfo di Cambio until

1288, so that when Dante was brought to it for baptism its exterior was still of rough grey stone; but to him it was always beautiful, always sacred, the Holy of Holies in which he had been made a child of God.

The work designed and carried out by Arnolfo in Florence is of almost incredible extent, as may be seen by a list of the principal buildings on which he was engaged during Dante's lifetime. The Badia, or Abbey Church of Florence,

> Whence still the chimes sound forth at Terce and Nones
> (*Paradiso*, XV., 97.)

was restored and enlarged by him: in 1284 he began to build the market and granary in which the church of Or San Michele had its origin: in 1294 he prepared the plans for the new cathedral and began the work in 1296, in which year he also began the erection of Santa Croce for the Franciscans, while in 1298 he added to his already stupendous undertakings by commencing the new Government offices, now known as the Palazzo Vecchio, the design for which he took from that Castle of Poppi in the Casentino which was one of Dante's many refuges during his years of exile. But though most of the glories of Florence as we know them to-day were then non-existent, the city was dear to Dante beyond any other place on earth, for within her walls a threefold light had risen upon him—the light of day at his birth, the light of God at his baptism, and the light of love at his meeting with Beatrice: How should Florence not be dear to him? How should he not eternally mourn his separation from her?

The city was at that time divided into six sections, or municipal wards, as we should now call them, which were known as *Sestiere* (sixths). The house in which Dante's

parents lived was situated in the Sesto San Piero, where not only the Portinari, but also the Donati, had their residence, so that Beatrice, the star of his devotion, and Gemma, the partner of his married life, both lived near to him in childhood.

Small as Florence then was, and narrow and ill-kept as were her streets, it was already a powerful state, and we know from contemporary records that the life of the citizens was very luxurious. Fra Francesco Pippino, for instance, writing in 1313, complains that frugality had been exchanged for magnificence, that the garments of the rich are made of silk and velvet and embroidered with gold and gems, and that furs are imported from foreign countries with which to line them. He complains also that there is too much love of feasting and amusement, that large sums of money are wasted upon meat and drink, and that the rich are becoming so ostentatious that they eat in public so that all men may see their pomp and consequence. These charges are corroborated by Dante, who makes Cacciaguida lament over the lapse of the Florentines from their thrift and modesty in the past: Florence, as he remembers it when on earth, was chaste and sober in all her ways—

> She had no armlets and no head-tires then;
> No purfled dames, no zone that caught the eye
> More than the person did. Time was not yet
> When at his daughter's birth the sire grew pale
> For fear the age and dowry should exceed
> On each side, just proportion. . . .
> I saw Bellincion Berti walk abroad
> In leathern girdle, and a clasp of bone;
> And, with no artful colouring on her cheeks,
> His lady leave the glass. The sons I saw
> Of Nerli and of Vecchio, well content
> With simple jerkins; and their good dames handling
> The spindle and the flax. (*Paradiso*, XV.)

That the Alighieri lived thus luxuriously, there is no evidence to show; they were well-born, but not noble; in comfortable circumstances, but not wealthy. The spirit of the past still lingers in the little Piazza di San Martino in which they lived; and though the church has no architectural beauty, it is interesting to all Dante lovers, since it was there that he paid his early devotions, and there that he was married to Gemma Donati. And the district that surrounds it is surely the very Florentine heart of Florence, for close by is the Borgo degli Albizzi, a street eloquent of the past history of the city, crooked and narrow, but lined with splendid palaces, where the tall houses tower up on either side, their lavishly decorated façades scarcely illuminated by the sunlight, so deep are the shadows they cast.

The near neighbourhood of the Alighieri and Portinari families may be realized by the present-day visitor to Florence; for though the Portinari palace is now in the possession of the *Credito Italiano* Bank, and the *Nicchia di Dante*, or niche, behind the pillars of the inner courtyard from which the boy gazed upon the object of his adoration, is no longer shown to the public, a tablet has been placed upon the wall that faces into the Corso, bearing the lines from the *Divina Commedia*:

> Sopra candido vel cinta d'oliva
> Donna m' apparve, sotto verde manto
> Vestita di color di fiamma viva.
> (Veiled all in snowy white, with olive wreathed,
> I saw a lady in green mantle clad,
> Her robe the colour of the living flame.)
> (*Purgatorio*, XXX., 31.)

Boccaccio tells the tale of this first meeting in his *Life* of the poet:

> In that season in which heaven reclothes the earth with all its adornments and makes her all smiling with varied flowers

scattered among green leaves, the custom obtained in our city that men and women should keep festival in different gatherings, each person in his own neighbourhood. And so it chanced that among others, Folco Portinari, a man held in great esteem among his fellow-citizens, on the first day of May, gathered his neighbours in his house for a feast. Now among them was the above-mentioned Alighieri, and with him, it being common for children to accompany their parents, especially at merry-makings—came our Dante, then about nine years old, who with the other children of his own age engaged in the sports appropriate to his years. Among these was a little child of the aforesaid Folco, called Bice, about eight years old, very winning, attractive and graceful in her ways, in aspect beautiful, earnest and grave in her speech, far beyond her years. This child turned her gaze from time to time upon Dante with so much tenderness as filled the boy brimful with delight, and he took her image so deeply into his mind that no subsequent pleasure could afterwards extinguish or expel it.

Charming as Boccaccio's narrative is, it lacks that final touch of grace and wonder that Rossetti's translation preserves for us in Dante's own story in the *Vita Nuova*:

Nine times already since my birth had the heavens of light returned to the same point almost as concerns its own revolution, when first the glorious lady of my mind was made manifest to my eyes, even she that was called Beatrice (*she who is blessed and a giver of blessing*), by many who knew not wherefore. She had already been in this life so long that, within her time, the starry heavens had moved towards the eastern quarter one of the twelve parts of a degree, so that she appeared to me at the beginning of her ninth year almost, and I saw her almost at the end of my ninth year. Her dress on that day was of a most noble colour, a subdued and goodly crimson, girdled and adorned in such sort as best suited with her very tender age. At that moment I say most truly that the spirit of life which hath its dwelling in the secretest chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that the least pulses of my body shook therewith. I say from that time forward, love quite governed my soul,

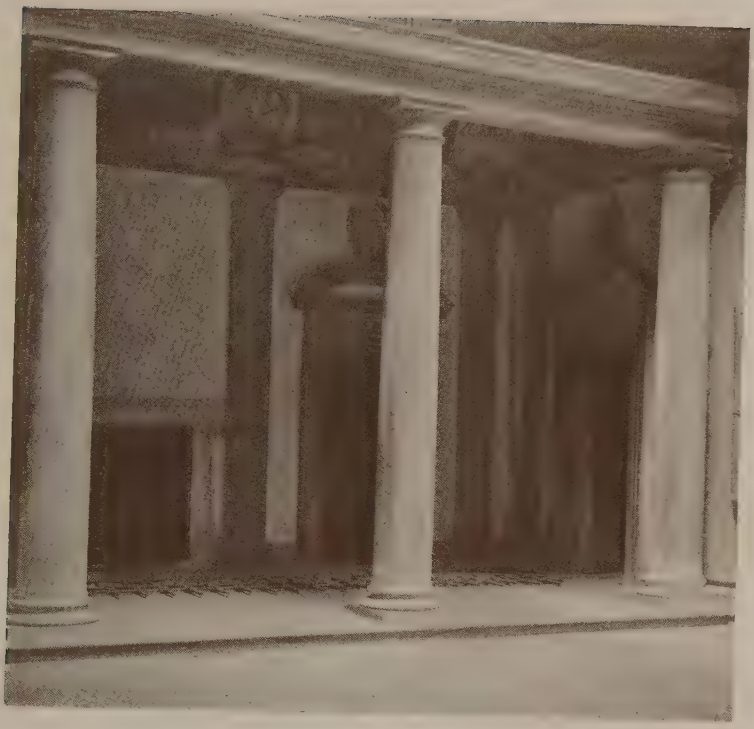
which was immediately espoused by him, and with so safe and undisputed a lordship that I had nothing left for it but to do his bidding continually. He oftentimes commanded me to seek if I might see this youngest of the angels; wherefore I in my boyhood often went in search of her, and found her so noble and praiseworthy that certainly of her might have been said these words of the poet Homer—she seemed not to be the daughter of a mortal man, but of God.

Leonardo Bruni, a later biographer of Dante (about 1430), condemns Boccaccio for dwelling upon the poet's early love, and says that his gallant conduct at the battle of Campaldino was better worthy attention:

I could wish that our Boccaccio had made mention of this valour rather than of his falling in love at nine years old and similar trivialities—(*simili leggierezze*) which he tells of so great a man. But what would you? The tongue goes where the tooth aches, and he who loves drinking is ever talking of wine.

This criticism, however, merely shows Bruni's own lack of comprehension, for the love of which he speaks so slightingly was not only the theme of some of the noblest poetry ever written, but it was the inspiration of the whole of Dante's life.

But great as was his love, the boy did not pass all his time in meditating upon it; he occupied himself, rather, in striving to make himself worthy of his Lady, and he was quick to seize all the advantages that came in his way. One of the greatest of these was the influence of Brunetto Latini, a profound scholar and prominent politician. It has been stated by several of Dante's biographers that Latini was his tutor, while others say that though he learnt much from him, their relation was never the formal one of master and pupil. Pompeo Venturi, in his notes to the edition of the *Divina Commedia*, published in Florence in 1813, makes the definite assertion:



[*Photograph A. T.*

COLONNADE OF THE INNER COURTYARD OF THE PORTINARI PALACE.

"*Brunetto fu per qualche tempo maestro di Dante,*" and Dante's allusion to him in the fifteenth Canto of the *Inferno* seems to bear this out:

> In my mind
> Is fixed and now strikes full upon my heart,
> The dear, benign, paternal image, such
> As thine, who showed me hour by hour
> The way for man to win eternity;
> And how I prized the lesson, it behoves
> That long as life endures, my tongue should speak.

The phrase, *ad ora ad ora m'insegnavate*, conveys the idea of daily and hourly instruction, but, at any rate, there is no doubt that Latini played a great part in Dante's mental development; he had a perfect command of Latin and French as well as of Italian, he was a fine orator, and he held office as Prior in the year 1287. In addition to all this, he was a poet, and, as such, well fitted to mould the intellect of the young student. His principal work, *Il Tesoro*, is a kind of compendium of all the subjects then commonly taught—scientific, historical and theological; but his later work, *Il Tesoretto* (The Little Treasure), is more interesting, for it holds some faint suggestion of the *Divina Commedia*—that is to say, it is cast in the form of a vision, and he represents himself at the beginning as losing himself in a wood through which he would never have found his way if the poet Ovid had not come to his aid.

That Dante substituted Virgil for Ovid in his own poem may have been partly due to the fact that he studied him so diligently under Latini's influence that he could repeat the whole of the *Æneid* by heart.

It was not only in Florence, however, that he studied; we are told by the early biographers that he attended lectures in Padua, in Pisa and Bologna, and that he was

entered at the University of Paris, and spent some time there. It is true that Voltaire sneers at this latter assertion—remarking: *"On prétend qu'il alla faire un voyage à Paris,"** but the man who could calmly affirm that his reputation rested on the fact that no one read his books (*"Sa reputation s'affermira toujours parce qu'on ne le lit guère"*) is not a safe guide to follow. Boccaccio adds that he came on to Britain—an assertion which has been construed into a positive statement that he studied at Oxford.

From whatever sources Dante gathered his knowledge, the result achieved was one that would not have been possible but for his great natural capacity—a capacity that Bruni declares was equal to "the highest things." Boccaccio tells us that he gave his whole mind to study—a proof that he did not allow his love to make him an idler and a lotus-eater; history, philosophy, logic, astronomy, astrology, natural history, music, painting, and many other subjects, were all studied by him, while the quotations and allusions to other writers in his books are a proof of the extraordinary range of his general reading. It is said that he refers to the Vulgate more than five hundred times, to the works of Aristotle more than three hundred, to those of Virgil two hundred, to Ovid a hundred, and that he shows an acquaintance with the works of Cicero, Lucan, Statius, Horace, Livy, Plato, Juvenal, Seneca, Ptolemy, St. Augustine, and many others. And all this, it must be remembered, before the invention of printing, when books were hard to come by, and when there were no Guides, or Encyclopædias, such as in our day provide the student with short cuts to knowledge. Nor was all this immense result achieved by a bookworm who lived out his days in the dust of

* *Dictionnaire Philosophique.*

libraries—Dante was a soldier and a statesman as well as a scholar, and moreover, for a great part of his life he was an exile and wanderer, unable to carry any books about with him, and harassed with continual trials and dangers.

His power of concentrating his mind upon his work is illustrated by Boccaccio in the following incident: During a visit to Siena, a friend showed him a book that he thought might be of interest to him; they were standing at the time at the door of an apothecary's shop and the great annual *festa* of the Sienese was going on in the streets outside. Dante took the book, and, sitting down on a bench beside the door, began to read it at noon, and was still reading it when the Vesper bells began to ring, and, on being asked how he could have continued his reading in the midst of the noise and excitement, "What noise?" he enquired, for he had heard nothing of it.

That Dante made many friends during this blossoming time of the intellect we know, not only from his own pages, but from the early Chroniclers, but there can hardly have been one among them who made a stronger impression upon his mind than the great painter, Giotto, who was some ten years younger than himself.

The well-known incidents of Giotto's childhood have been dismissed as legendary by some modern critics; but "legends," as has already been said, have a disconcerting way of re-establishing themselves, to the confusion of those who reject them, so that we need not trouble ourselves too much over the discredit thrown upon them. Cimabue, we are told, walking in the fields of Vespignano, a village near Florence, saw a peasant boy making pictures of his father's sheep upon a piece of slate with a sharp-pointed stone; struck by his skill, he asked Bondone, the boy's father, to let him be trained as an artist, and, taking him back to Florence, instructed him in his own studio.

It is at Assisi, when he was twenty-four years old, that we first hear of Giotto as a painter; and if nothing else of his existed besides the frescoes in the church of S. Francesco, his glory would still have been established for all time; but, like Arnolfo di Cambio, his achievements were so many and so great, his invention so inexhaustible, and his powers of execution so marvellous, that he will ever be looked upon as one of the wonders of the world.

The Campanile, in Florence, perhaps the greatest of all his works, was not begun until after Dante's death, but he was already known as an architect as well as a painter, for when Arnolfo died in 1300, Giotto was appointed to direct the building of the cathedral; and since this was the time when Dante was in office, they must have been much thrown together. Both were men of mighty genius and rare spirit, each was a daring innovator in his own art, each had the power of portraying the unseen and making it live; and not only in Florence, but through the years of Dante's exile, we are told that they exchanged suggestions and ideas.

It was indeed a golden age in Italy when such men as these were pouring out their various gifts in lavish profusion; but though we are told that Art and Poetry need an atmosphere of peace if they are to flourish, Dante's early life was passed amid strife and faction, and he himself was not only a scholar, but a soldier: "He fought valiantly in the front rank at Campaldino," says Leonardo Bruni, which means that he was one of the *Feditori*, a band of specially chosen men whose fidelity and courage could be relied upon and who were always put in advance of the rest of the soldiers. It is also stated that he was present at the siege of Caprona, both siege and battle taking place in the year 1289. "At the battle of Campaldino," says the fragment of a

letter which Bruni quotes as written by Dante, "the Ghibelline party was routed and almost slain wholly. I was there, a novice in arms; I had great fear and at last great joy, on account of the divers chances of the fight."

It was not for himself that Dante feared—Bruni, as we have seen, wished that Boccaccio had described his valour in battle—it was for the varying fortunes of the day when the people of Arezzo so nearly conquered the Florentines. Both Villani and Dino Compagni give descriptions of the fight in their Chronicles: Large bodies of troops were engaged on both sides, the leaders were gallant and brave, the soldiers eager and determined; both armies were resolved on victory, but fortune favoured the Florentines; their captains, says Compagni, set a body of troops in front of the army, bearing white shields with the red lily of Florence upon them, and the Bishop of Arezzo, who was short-sighted, enquired "What walls are those?" "The enemy's shields," was the answer, and walls of defence indeed they proved; the battle was fierce, the Bishop was slain, and the Ghibelline army was put to flight.

In the fifth Canto of the *Purgatorio*, Dante describes his meeting with Buonconte, the son of Guido da Montefeltro, who fought for Arezzo and was fatally wounded as he led the charge of the Ghibelline cavalry, and says that he asked him to explain how it was that his body had never been found when the battle-plain was searched for the dead:

> From Campaldino's field what force or chance
> Drew thee, that ne'er thy sepulture was known?
> "Oh!" answered he, "at Casentino's foot
> A stream there courseth, named Archiano, sprung
> In Apennine above the hermit's seat,
> E'en where its name is cancelled, there came I,
> Pierced in the throat, fleeing away on foot,

> And bloodying the plain; here sight and speech
> Failed me, and finishing with Mary's name
> I fell, and tenantless my flesh remained."

This spot is not far from the Hermitage of the Camaldoli, and the name of the Archiano is "cancelled" by its falling into the Arno as it flows down from the hills.

Buonconte then goes on to tell that in his death-hour he folded his arms in the form of the Cross as a wordless appeal for mercy, and that the Devil, unable to take him, lashed the stream into fury to try and unlock the stiffened arms, so that the body was dashed in pieces among the rocks, but that the appeal was recognised in Heaven, for it is in Purgatory that his spirit is placed and not in Hell.

In the twenty-second Canto of the *Inferno*, Dante alludes to his own experiences in the battle:

> It hath been heretofore my chance to see
> Horsemen with martial order shifting camp,
> To onset sallying, or in muster ranged,
> Or in retreat sometimes outstretched for flight:
> Light-armèd squadrons and fleet foragers
> Scouring thy plains, Arezzo, have I seen.

The rout of the Ghibelline forces was complete, and it was not perhaps to be wondered at that the Guelfs, in their exultation, should try to increase the splendour of their victory by adding a miraculous element to it; Villani states that on the day of the battle the Priors of Florence were shut within an inner chamber of their palace during the heat of the day, when its door was shaken violently and a cry sounded in their ears: "Arise! the Aretini are defeated!" They ran to the door in eager excitement, but to their astonishment no one was to be seen, and when the guards were called they persisted in

saying that no one had passed through the gates of the palace. From noon to the hour of Vespers the Priors wondered and questioned, but when evening came, messengers from the battlefield appeared in Florence, bringing the news of the victory.

One of the bravest leaders of the Guelf troops was Corso Donati, a member of the family into which Dante afterwards married; he returned from the battle to be flattered and fêted by his fellow-citizens, but his pride and ambition afterwards incensed them against him, and, fearing that he meant to make himself ruler over them, they vowed vengeance against him. Corso fled from the city by the Porta Santa Croce, but was pursued, and, falling from his horse, was dragged along the ground and finally put to death by his enemies, as Dante tells in the twenty-fourth Canto of the *Purgatorio*:

> Lo, he whose guilt is most,
> Passes before my vision, dragged at heels
> Of an infuriate beast. Toward the vale
> Where guilt hath no redemption, on it speeds,
> Each step increasing swiftness on the last,
> Until a blow it strikes that leaveth him
> A corse most vilely shattered.

The siege of Caprona took place a few months after the battle of Campaldino, in August, 1289. Belonging to the province of Pisa, Caprona was defended by Pisan troops against the armies of Florence and Lucca, but they were unable to hold out, and finally capitulated on condition that their lives were spared. Benvenuto da Imola mentions in his Chronicle that Dante was present as "a young man of twenty-five," and he is therefore describing what he had himself seen when in the twenty-first Canto of the *Inferno* he likens the fiends who barred

the way to the foe who watched the Pisans issue from the fortress:

> Then to me my guide—"Oh! thou
> Who on the bridge among the crags dost sit
> Low crouching, safely now to me return."
> I rose and towards him moved with speed; the fiends
> Meanwhile all forward drew; me terror seized
> Lest they should break the compact they had made.
> Thus issuing from Caprona once I saw
> Th' infantry, dreading lest his covenant
> The foe should break, so close he hemmed them round.

In this first twenty-five years of his life, then, Dante showed himself an ardent scholar, a devoted lover and a gallant soldier, and it is this period that is commemorated in the fresco portrait in the chapel of the Bargello, which was discovered in 1841. That Giotto painted such a portrait while he was employed to decorate the walls of the chapel, had always been known, but all trace of it had been lost. Through the efforts of Seymour Kirkup and others, the whitewash that coated the walls was taken away, and on one of them the portrait was found in a group of three, the other two heads being those of the great scholar, Brunetto Latini, and the daring soldier, Corso Donati. This portrait of Dante is of extraordinary interest, for before its discovery the only representations of him were in later life, with the marks of his sorrows lining his face; when Carlyle delivered his famous lectures on "Heroes" in 1840, he described the poet from these, and speaks of his "tragic, heart-affecting face," with its "deathless scorn and sorrow and its implacable resignation," as the "mournfulest face ever painted from reality." This description is fully justified by the features of the death-mask, of the bas-relief at Ravenna, of the bronze bust in Naples, and of the portrait in the

[*Drawing by Ascanio Tealdi*

FRESCO PORTRAIT OF DANTE ON THE WALL OF THE BARGELLO CHAPEL.

Duomo in Florence by Domenico di Michelino; but if Carlyle's lectures had been delivered a few months later he would have known that there was another and a totally different conception of the "tragic face," for the portrait that emerged from the entombing whitewash in 1841 has the youthful softness and the "Apollo look," described by Seymour Kirkup in the letter that he wrote to Gabriele Rossetti to announce the discovery, where he speaks of it as "a fine, noble image of the hero of Campaldino and the lover of Beatrice."

It is not here that he wears the laurel crown, nor is his face sunken and his eyes hollowed by grief as we see him in the familiar portrait by Tofanelli which follows the old painting in the Duomo; the Bargello fresco shows the same features, but it has nothing of the "abnegation, the proud, hopeless pain," that so moved the eloquence of Carlyle, and its charm has never been better expressed than in the poem with which it inspired J. R. Lowell:

> With half-dropped lids, and smooth, round brow,
> And eye remote that dimly sees
> Fair Beatrice' spirit wandering now
> In some sea-lulled Hesperides,
> Thou movest through the jarring street
> Secluded from the noise of feet
> By her gift-blossom in thy hand,
> A branch of palm from Holy-land—
> No trace is here of ruin's fiery sleet.

It is the rapt intensity of look that is the most striking characteristic of Dante's pictured face, both in youth and age, and this is not surprising, since no man ever possessed a greater faculty for looking through external objects to the unseen that lay behind them.

We are told by his biographers that he loved to meditate as he gazed upon the things around him, and that he used

to sit on a stone bench and watch the walls of the new cathedral rising upon the site of the old church of Santa Reparata under the direction of Arnolfo di Cambio.

In Wordsworth's day the bench was still there, as he tells us in the sonnet, *At Florence*:

> Under the shadow of a stately pile,
> The Dome of Florence, pensive and alone,
> Nor giving heed to aught that passed the while,
> I stood, and gazed upon a marble stone,
> The laurelled Dante's favourite seat. A throne
> In just esteem, it rivals—though no style
> Be there of decoration to beguile
> The mind, depressed by thought of greatness flown.
> As a true man, who long had served the lyre,
> I gazed with earnestness, and dared no more.
> But in his breast the mighty Poet bore
> A Patriot's heart, warm with undying fire.
> Bold with the thought, in reverence I sat down,
> And for a moment filled the empty throne.

Since Wordsworth's day the bench has been removed, but a stone built into the wall, with the inscription *Sasso di Dante,* marks the place where it stood, and it is to be wished that the city authorities who permit unsightly advertisements of all kinds to disfigure the buildings in the Piazza del Duomo, would at least prevent them from encroaching on the venerated stone.

Dreams of the future, as well as memories of the past, no doubt filled the mind of the patriot-poet as he rested there, but he can scarcely have had any prevision of what the future was to bring him; familiar sights and sounds were all around him, his well-loved Baptistery—*il mio bel San Giovanni*—not only delighted his eyes, but reminded him that he was an accepted son of the Church as well as a trusted servant of the State: how could he foresee that he was to be cast out of the "sheep-fold"?

or that when the stern decree of banishment was at last repented of and his portrait was allowed to find a place in that cathedral the growth of which he had watched, it would be that of a man borne down with sorrows and acquainted with the full bitterness of grief?

But all this was as yet in the future, and disgrace and exile must have been far enough away from the thoughts of the man who sat and dreamed upon his stone bench, the man who spent his days in deep study—study that was a joy to him for its own sake—the man whose life was irradiated with the glory of a pure and noble love, the man who passed golden hours in intercourse with kindred spirits in art, poetry and learning.

Life, in these early days, was seen by Dante, not through a glass darkly, but through a mist brightly; love and hope and rainbow visions of delight were ever before his eyes—not the delights of pleasure and self-indulgence, but of soul-heights attained and of tasks for his fellow-men accomplished. And, in spite of those shattering storms that were destined to break over his head, triumph came to him at last; the apotheosis of love was revealed to him in the form of divine Beatitude, and his share in the consolidation of his country was recognised and acclaimed by the whole of United Italy.

But the rainbow dreams that had shed their glow upon his youth were dispelled for ever when Beatrice passed out of his sight.

The Lover.

It is among the great lovers, as well as among the great poets of the world, that Dante has his place; and though some critics have declined to believe in the personality of Beatrice, declaring her to be only an abstraction

of Wisdom, or an embodiment of Philosophy, Boccaccio—as we have seen—gives intimate details of her appearance, her home and her family. His testimony on such points as these is difficult to doubt, for he was born seven years before Dante's death, and was thus acquainted with many people in Florence who had known him well; and he not only tells us that he obtained many facts for his life of the poet from Andrea Poggi, the son of Dante's sister, "who often spoke to me of Dante's habits and ways," but he was also acquainted with Dante's daughter Beatrice, who was named after the lady whom her father had loved, and who would surely have known if she had been merely an abstraction.

Pietro Alighieri, the son of the poet, also identifies Beatrice with the daughter of Folco Portinari; and if any further corroboration is needed, it may be found in the poems of Guido Cavalcanti and Cino da Pistoia, intimate friends of Dante's, who bear out in their poems all that he says of her beauty, of his love for her, and of his grief at her death.

But though Dante's name will never cease to be coupled with that of Beatrice Portinari, his love for her was of a very different kind from that of Romeo for Juliet, or of Petrarch for Laura. As far as can be gathered from his writings, he worshipped her in secret, not only hiding his love from the world, but from his Lady herself. He makes no lament over her marriage to Simone de'Bardi—it is not even certain that he alludes to it; for if, as some have thought, his emotion at the wedding feast that he describes in the *Vita Nuova* was due to the fact that Beatrice herself was the bride, how could he have been surprised, as he tells us that he was, by suddenly beholding her there? And, since he never expresses any wish or hope that he may be united to her, the word

"mystical" may undoubtedly be applied to his passion; but a mystical love may be felt, and often has been felt, for a material object; and the more study that we give to the question, the more impossible it seems to doubt that it was a living, breathing woman, in whom he found the inspiration of his genius.

His first sight of the child Beatrice in the courtyard of her father's house coloured his whole future life, for he tells us in the *Vita Nuova* that from that day onward his thoughts continually dwelt upon her:

> Her image, that was with me always, was an exultation of love to subdue me, albeit it was yet of so perfect a quality that it never allowed me to be over-ruled by love without the faithful counsel of Reason, whensoever such counsel was useful to be heard.

But when they had both reached the age of eighteen, he describes a meeting with her in the streets of Florence which kindled the fire of his latent genius and started him on his poetic career:

> After the lapse of so many days that nine years exactly were completed since the above-written appearance of this most gracious being, on the last of these days it happened that the same wonderful lady appeared to me, dressed all in pure white, between two gentle ladies older than she. And passing through a street, she turned her eyes thither where I stood sorely abashed, and by her unspeakable courtesy, which is now guerdoned in the great Cycle, she saluted me with so virtuous a bearing that I seemed then and there to behold the very limits of blessedness. The hour of her most sweet salutation was exactly the ninth of that day, and because it was the first time that any words of hers reached my ears, I came into such sweetness that I parted thence as one intoxicated, and betaking me to the loneliness of my own room, I fell to thinking of this most courteous lady, and thinking of her I was overtaken by a pleasant slumber, wherein a marvellous vision was presented to me.

This vision he goes on to describe in a sonnet, sending it, after the fashion of the day, to the poets and critics of his acquaintance for their interpretation, and afterwards including it in the *Vita Nuova*, the work which he wrote to celebrate his New Life—the life which was awakened in him by love.

To every heart which the sweet pain doth move
And unto which these words may now be brought,
For true interpretation and kind thought,
Be greeting in our Lord's name, which is Love.
Of those long hours wherein the stars above
Wake and keep watch, the third was almost nought
When Love was shown me with such terrors fraught
As may not carelessly be spoken of.
He seemed like one who is full of joy, and had
My heart within his hand, and on his arm
My Lady, with a mantle round her, slept;
Whom (having wakened her) anon he made
To eat that heart; she ate, as fearing harm;
Then he went out, and as he went he wept.

To this sonnet, Dante di Maiano replied in another, in which he scoffingly declares that the vision is "mere delirium," and that the sooner Dante consults a physician the better. Cino da Pistoia, on the other hand, answered with a touch of true poetic tenderness:

Each lover's longing leads him naturally
Unto his Lady's heart, his heart to show,
And this it is that Love would have thee know
By the strange vision that he sent to thee.
With thy heart, therefore, flaming outwardly,
In humble guise he fed thy Lady so,
Who long had lain in slumber, from all woe
Folded within a mantle, silently.
Also, in coming, Love might not repress
His joy, to yield thee thy desire achieved.
Whence heart should unto heart true service bring.

But understanding the great love-sickness
Which in thy Lady's bosom was conceived,
He pitied her and wept in vanishing.*

But the friend who understood Dante best, at this and at all times, was Guido Cavalcanti, a poet some fifteen years older than himself, but, like him, a pupil of Brunetto Latini. Their first acquaintance seems to have been through this mystical sonnet, for Dante says that among the many answers to it that he received was one "sent by him whom I now call the first among my friends, and it began thus—

Unto my thinking thou beholdst all worth—

and indeed it was when he learned that I was he who had sent these rhymes to him that our friendship commenced."

Dino Compagni, the friend of both, says that Guido was "of gentle birth, courteous and bold, but disdainful, solitary and intent on study"; but he and Dante seem to have found much pleasure in each other's society and exchanged many poems, and in one of the best known, Dante wishes that he and Guido and Lapo Gianni—that Lapo who was later on to be associated with Dante in the office of Prior—might set sail on summer seas with the three ladies whom they loved—his own Beatrice, Guido's Joan, and Lapo's Lagia, whom, with perhaps too little deference to Lapo's choice, he had placed thirtieth on his list of the sixty loveliest ladies in Florence:

Guido, I wish that Lapo, thou and I,
Could be by spells conveyed as it were now
Upon a barque with all the winds that blow
Across all seas at our good will to hie.
So no mischance or temper of the sky
Should mar our course with spite or cruel slip:

* Translated by D. G. Rossetti.

But we, observing old companionship,
To be companions still should long thereby.
And lady Joan and lady Beatrice,
And she, the thirtieth on my roll, with us
Should our good wizard set, o'er seas to move
And not to talk of anything but love:
And they three ever to be well at ease
As we should be, I think, if this were thus.

It seems strange that this worship of Dante for his Lady should have been misunderstood by so many of his biographers. Carlyle mentions it casually, as one among the few incidents of the poet's life that have come down to us; he was born, he went to school, he served as a soldier, he held an office in the State—"he had met in boyhood a beautiful little girl of his own age and rank, and grown up thenceforward in partial sight of her, in some distant intercourse with her. All readers know his graceful, affecting account of this, and then of their being parted, of her being wedded to another, and of her death soon after. She makes a great feature in Dante's poem, seems to have made a great figure in his life."

Macaulay, in the article on Dante which appeared in *Knight's Quarterly Magazine*, says: "In early youth he had entertained a strong and unfortunate passion, which long after the death of her whom he loved continued to haunt him." And, in dealing with the *Paradiso*, he says that Beatrice, "the unforgotten object of his early tenderness, was invested by him with mystical attributes. By a confusion, like that which often takes place in dreams, he has sometimes lost sight of her human nature and even of her personal existence, and seems to consider her as one of the attributes of the Deity."

But brief statements such as these, inadequate though they are, do not jar upon the mind in the same way as the distasteful love-making which no less a writer than

Landor puts into the mouths of Dante and Beatrice in his *Imaginary Conversations*, a love-making entirely out of keeping with the exquisite purity of the adoration revealed in the *Vita Nuova*:

Beatrice. Now you are calm and reasonable—listen to me, you must marry.

Dante. Marry!

Beatrice. Unless you do so, how can we meet again unreservedly. Worse, worse than ever! I cannot bear to see those large, heavy tears, following one another, heavy and slow as nuns at the funeral of a sister. Come, I will kiss off one if you will promise me faithfully to shed no more. Be tranquil, be tranquil, only hear reason. Don't you hear me? Don't turn aside and only go further off. I will have that hand—it twists about as if it hated its confinement. I will never be fond of you again if you are so violent. We have been together too long and we may be noticed.

If Beatrice had ever spoken in such a way as this she would have disgusted the lover whose humility before the Lady of his heart was the voluntary submission of a proud and dignified man. Which is the most degrading—that Beatrice should speak of herself as being "fond of" Dante, or that Dante should be described as "violent" in his love for her who was to him as one of the Angels of God, or that they should be represented as snatching stolen interviews, hoping that no one would notice them? It is almost incredible that a writer of Landor's imaginative power should have shown such a total want of sympathy with his subject; and the wonder is all the greater because there is a passage in his *Pericles and Aspasia* which might have come from the inmost heart of the writer of the *Vita Nuova*: "There is a gloom in deep love as in deep water; there is a silence in it which suspends the foot, and the folded arms and the

dejected head are the images that it reflects. No voice shakes its surface, the Muses themselves approach it with a timid and tardy step, and with a low and tremulous and melancholy song."

It was with this silence and this tremor that Dante loved Beatrice; if he saw her in the street he says that he stood silent and trembling while she passed, if he found himself in company with her, his one desire was that no one should suspect his feelings for her—a desire so deeply rooted that he tells us that he selected some other lady as "a screen for the truth," and seemed to address his adoration to her. Even when he praises his Lady's beauty it is of her soul that he writes rather than of her bodily perfections. In the *Canzone* that begins

> Ladies that have intelligence in love,

he thus describes her:

> Love saith concerning her: "How chanceth it
> That flesh, which is of dust, should be thus pure?"
> Then, gazing always, he makes oath: "For sure,
> This is a creature of God till now unknown.
> She hath that paleness of the pearl that's fit
> In a fair woman, so much and not more;
> She is as high as Nature's skill can soar;
> Beauty is tried by her comparison.
> Whatever her sweet eyes are turned upon,
> Spirits of love do issue thence in flame,
> Which through their eyes who then may look on them
> Pierce to the heart's deep chamber every one.
> And in her smile Love's image you may see;
> Whence none can gaze upon her steadfastly."

And again in a sonnet:

> My Lady carries Love within her eyes,
> All that she looks on is made pleasanter;
> Upon her path men turn to gaze at her:

He whom she greeteth feels his heart to rise,
And droops his troubled visage, full of sighs,
And of his evil heart is then aware:
Hate loves, and pride becomes a worshipper.
O women, help to praise her in somewise.
Humbleness, and the hope that hopeth well,
By speech of hers into the mind are brought
And who beholds is blessed oftenwhiles.
The look she hath when she a little smiles
Cannot be said, nor holden in the thought,
'Tis such a new and gracious miracle.

That this is not ordinary love is apparent at once, and it is on the absence of any expressed desire to forge links of union between Beatrice and himself that the theory of her non-existence is founded. Dante loved her through the whole of his youth, and he was only twenty-six when she died—surely there must have been another chapter to the story if she had been a living woman—a chapter of anguish and longing!

But the fact that Dante makes no mention of any fierce pangs of jealousy, nor of any desire to wrest her from her earthly bridegroom, does not prove that Beatrice did not exist, it only shows that Dante's devotion was not the feeling that ordinarily goes by the name of love, but was rather the imaginative passion that Shelley describes in his *Epipsychidion*:

On an imagined shore
Under the grey beak of some promontory,
She met me, robed in such exceeding glory
That I beheld her not. In solitudes
Her voice came to me through the whispering woods,
And from the fountains, and the odours deep
Of flowers, which like lips murmuring in their sleep,
Of the sweet kisses which had lulled them there,
Breathed but of her to the enamoured air—
And therefore I went forth, with hope and fear

And every gentle passion sick to death,
Feeding my course with expectation's breath,
Into the wintry forest of our life.

But though the passion was the same, the experience of the two poets was totally different. Shelley sought for his ideal in many human forms, each new discovery filled him with hope and each new hope faded away into subsequent disillusionment: "Some of us have in a prior existence been in love with an Antigone," he wrote to his friend Leigh Hunt, "and that makes us find full content in no mortal tie. I think one is always in love with something or other, the error—and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it—consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal."

Dante, on the other hand, not only found his Antigone, but experienced perfect and unchanging satisfaction in his devotion to her—devotion which is exactly described in Shelley's well-known lines:

I can give not what men call love,
But wilt thou accept not
The worship the heart lifts above
And the heavens reject not.
The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.

The last two lines show us why Dante was successful in his quest of Antigone, while Shelley's life was passed in a storm of conflicting emotions: from first to last Dante worshipped "from afar," making no effort to draw his Lady into the current of his everyday existence; but Shelley could not be content out of sight and sound of

his idol for the time being, and therefore his worship was disturbed with fears, hopes, jealousies, despair, heart-burnings, and sometimes heart-breakings.

That there was actually a young Simone de' Bardi whose wife was named Beatrice Portinari is proved by existing records; he is mentioned in 1290 as being Councillor to the Commune, and there are allusions to him as late as 1315. The will of her father, dated January, 1288, shows that they were already married in that year. Folco had made many benefactions in his lifetime to his native city, including the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, founded (as is recorded on the tablet below the bas-relief which shows her in her quaint *coif* and ruff on the cloister wall of Santa Maria Nuova), by the suggestion of his housekeeper, Monna Tessa, a charitable woman who visited the sick poor, and told her master of the difficulty of securing proper attention for them. "Humbly do I commend my soul unto the living God," runs the will, "and I do desire to be buried in the chapel of my hospital of Santa Maria Nuova. Unto God, unto the Lord Jesus Christ and unto the Blessed Virgin Mary, His Mother, do I offer the aforesaid hospital and chapel, or church, as an atonement for the sins of myself and my family and for the service of the sick and poor."

He then goes on to make various bequests, among them, one to Beatrice. Legacies are left to religious bodies, and charitable institutions; his wife and sister and his four unmarried daughters are provided for, and he mentions a sum of "fifty Florentine pounds" for "Madonna Bice, wife of Messer Simone de' Bardi." The hospital was opened in the following June with solemn services, and in the next year, 1289, Folco died, and was buried according to the directions left in his will. The

church of S. Egidio now stands upon the site of the hospital chapel, and there the tomb may still be seen, with the inscription: "Here lies Folco Portinari, who was founder and builder of the church and hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, and died in the year 1289 on the thirty-first day of December. May his soul rest in peace through the mercy of God."

No dates are mentioned in the *Vita Nuova*, but Dante gives a moving picture of the grief of Beatrice at the death of her father:

Not many days after this, (it being the will of the most high God, who also from Himself put away death), the father of the wonderful Beatrice, going out of this life, passed certainly into glory. Thereby it happened, as of very sooth it might not be otherwise, that this lady was made full of the bitterness of grief: seeing that such a parting is very grievous unto those friends who are left, and that no other friendship is like to that between a good parent and a good child; and further considering that this lady was good in the supreme degree, and her father (as by many it hath been truly averred) of exceeding goodness; and because it is the usage of that city that men meet with men and women with women in such a grief, certain ladies of her companionship gathered themselves unto Beatrice, where she kept alone in her weeping, and as they passed in and out, I could hear them speak concerning her, how she wept. At length two of them went by me, who said, "Certainly she grieveth in such sort that one might die for pity, beholding her." Then feeling the tears upon my face, I put up my hands to hide them: and had it not been that I hoped to hear more concerning her, (seeing that where I sat her friends passed continually in and out), I should assuredly have gone thence to be alone when I felt the tears come. But as I still sat in that place, certain ladies again passed near me, who were saying among themselves: "Which of us shall be joyful any more, who have listened to this lady in her piteous sorrow?" And there were others who said as they went by me: "He that sitteth here could not weep more if he had beheld her as we have beheld her." And again: "He is so altered

that he seemeth not as himself." And still as the ladies passed to and fro, I could hear them speak after this fashion of her and of me.

It was the grief of Beatrice that made Dante weep, but when a few weeks had passed by he tells us that he began to feel an agonising sorrow on his own account, for Folco's death brought reflections on the uncertainty of life to his mind, and as he meditated on this, the thought darted through his brain: "Certainly it must some time come to pass that the very gentle Beatrice will die," and with the thought there rose up the vision which he describes in one of the most beautiful poems in the *Vita Nuova*:

I was a-thinking how life fails with us
Suddenly after such a little while;
When Love sobbed in my heart, which is his home;
Whereby my spirit waxed so dolorous
That in myself I said with sick recoil:
"Yea, to my Lady too this Death must come."
And therewithal such a bewilderment
Possessed me, that I shut mine eyes for peace;
And in my brain did cease
Order of thought and every healthful thing.
Afterwards, wandering.
Amid a swarm of doubts that came and went,
Some certain women's faces hurried by,
And shrieked to me, "Thou too shalt surely die."

Then saw I many broken, hinted sights,
In the uncertain state I stepped into.
Meseemed to be I know not in what place.
Where ladies through the streets, like mournful lights,
Ran with loose hair and eyes that frightened you,
By their own terror and a pale amaze.
The while, little by little, as I thought,
The sun ceased and the stars began to gather,
And each wept at the other;

And birds dropped in mid-flight out of the sky;
And earth shook suddenly;
And I was 'ware of one, hoarse and tired out,
Who asked of me: "Hast thou not heard it said?
Thy Lady, she that was so fair, is dead."

Then lifting up mine eyes as the tears came
I saw the Angels, like a rain of manna,
In a long flight, flying back heavenward;
Having a little cloud in front of them.
After the which they went and said "Hosanna,"
And if they had said more you should have heard.
Then Love said, "Now shall all things be made clear,
Come and behold our Lady where she lies.
These wildering phantasies
Then carried me to see my Lady dead.
Even as I there was led
Her ladies with a veil were covering her;
And with her was such very humbleness
That she appeared to say, "I am at peace."

This description of the angels flying upwards through the sky with the ascending soul of Beatrice wafted before them like a little cloud, is one so exquisite that every reading of it—either in the original or in Rossetti's beautiful translation—is a fresh delight. But there is one place beyond all others in which it comes home to the mind, not only with delight, but with a convincing power. To walk at sunset on the heights of Bellosguardo, when a soft summer wind has tossed the drifting clouds into feathery loveliness—loveliness that glows with every rainbow hue—is to see, not in vision, but in reality, the sky afloat with wings: great golden wings that sail across the wide space of blue, wings of dusky purple that hang low in the wind, wings shot with every opal tint that shimmer in the rays of the sun, all sweeping in radiant flight like the angel host made visible, while here and there

a little cloud, bright as living silver, soft as the under side of a dove's wing, soars up before them like a pure soul wafted on its way from earth to heaven.

On the eastern side of the ridge, far below, lies Florence, the towers of the Badia and the Bargello that Dante knew so well, easily discernible between the battlemented belfry of the Palazzo Vecchio and the great dome of the cathedral; while on the western side the plain stretches away and away to the distant hills, a plain shining like the sea in the light of the sinking sun, where the air is musical with the chime of Vesper bells, where the peasant still tends his fields and the great white oxen draw the plough, as Dante saw them six hundred years ago when he looked up into the sky and beheld the Angels flying back to heaven with the soul of Beatrice borne upon the air like a little cloud.

It is not only in his translation of the *Canzone* that Rossetti shows how he had breathed in its spirit, but in his well-known picture, *Dante's Dream*, now in the Walker Art Gallery at Liverpool. It was not the vision of Angels that he chose for its subject, but Beatrice upon her couch of death while Love leads Dante by the hand and bids him look upon her. It was of this painting that Sir Noel Paton said: "Fifty years hence it will be named among the half-dozen supreme pictures of the world," and besides being surpassingly beautiful in itself, it has been to many a revelation of the wonder and the radiance of Dante's thoughts. Beatrice is represented as clad in soft and flowing draperies, her wealth of bright hair rippling over her shoulders to the ground. At the head and foot of her couch stand her ladies, holding a canopy above her, and by her side stands Dante with half-fearful look, while Love holds him by the hand and the dove of Peace comes flying in from an open door through which

the distant towers of Florence are seen. The signification of the picture bears out in every particular the signification of the poem that inspired it—for such pure and heavenly souls as that of Beatrice, there is no death—it is Love, not Death, who closes their eyes to this world, Love and not Death who bears them away for awhile from the hearts to whom they are dear, living Love and not silent Death who blesses them with the gift of peace.

Dante's dream was only too surely prophetic; the blow that he dreaded did not fall immediately, but he could not blind his eyes to the fact that as day after day passed by his lady seemed to grow more akin to the Divine. He tells us that:

> She came at last into such favour with all men that when she passed anywhere folk ran to behold her, which thing was a deep joy to me; and when she drew near unto any, so much truth and simpleness entered into his heart that he dared neither to lift his eyes nor to return her salutation—and unto this many who have felt it can bear witness. She went along crowned and clothed with humility, showing no whit of pride in all that she heard and saw; and when she had gone by it was said of many: "This is not a woman, but one of the beautiful angels of heaven," and there were some who said: "This is surely a miracle; blessed be the Lord who hath power to work thus marvellously." I say of very sooth that she showed herself so gentle and so full of all perfections that she bred in those who looked upon her a soothing quiet beyond any speech; neither could any look upon her without sighing immediately. These things, and things yet more wonderful, were brought to pass through her miraculous virtue.

This sense of something unearthly in her look and bearing, in some sort prepared Dante for the sudden tidings of her death, which came to him, he says, while he was actually engaged in writing a poem in her praise. He gives the fragment of the poem, in which he says that

Love has now entire possession of his being, and that he longs continually for the sight of his Lady, who is more sweet than any words can show. At that point came the grievous news, and he breaks off with the words: *Quomodo sedat sola civitas plena populo! facta est quasi vidua domina gentium.* (How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people! how is she become a widow that was great among the nations.)

An outburst of passionate sorrow might have been expected to follow, but Dante was as reserved and dignified in his grief as in his love, and he goes on to say that he does not propose to give an account of her death, nor does he explain his reason for writing of it to the principal citizens of Florence, and makes no mention of what he said to them, beyond again quoting the above-mentioned text.

> After this most gracious creature had gone out from among us, the whole city came to be, as it were, widowed, and despoiled of all dignity. Then, I, left mourning in this desolate city, wrote unto the principal persons thereof in an epistle concerning its condition; taking for my commencement these words of Jeremiah—*Quomodo sedat sola civitas*, etc.

It was not until his anguish was a little past that he could find relief in words—"When mine eyes had wept for some while, until they were so weary with weeping that I could no longer through them give ease to my sorrow, I bethought me that a few mournful words might stand me in stead of tears," the beautiful poem then follows, of which the two most beautiful verses are these:

> Beatrice is gone up into high Heaven,
> The kingdom where the Angels are at peace;
> And lives with them, and to her friends is dead.
> Not by the frost of winter was she driven

Away, like others; nor by summer-heats;
But through a perfect gentleness, instead.
For, from the lamp of her meek lowlihead
Such an exceeding glory went up hence
That it woke wonder in the Eternal Sire,
Until a sweet desire
Entered Him for that lovely excellence,
So that He bade her to Himself aspire;
Counting this weary and most evil place
Unworthy of a thing so full of grace.

Wonderfully out of the beautiful form
Soared her clear spirit, waxing glad the while;
And is in its first home, there where it is.
Who speaks thereof and feels not the tears warm
Upon his face, must have become so vile
As to be dead to all sweet sympathies.
Out upon him! an abject wretch like this
May not imagine anything of her,—
He needs no bitter tears for his relief.
But sighing comes, and grief,
And the desire to find no comforter,
(Save only Death, who makes all sorrow brief),
To him who for a while turns in his thought
How she hath been among us and is not.

But although Dante did not allow himself any violent expression of grief, we know from other sources that his sorrow was utterly despairing. Boccaccio says that he could not speak, sleep or eat, so that he became *una cosa selvatica a vedere* (a thing wild and strange to see); and from his friend, Cino da Pistoia, we learn that he was even tempted to follow her to the grave. He who had so sympathetically interpreted Dante's vision, now sends him a *Canzone* in which he testifies alike to the beauty and virtues of Beatrice and to the grief caused by her death. He beseeches Dante, in the first place, to remember the

blessedness of joy that Beatrice is now experiencing—God has called her

> to have Heaven perfected,
> Each saint for a new thing beholds her face,
> And she the face of our Redemption sees.

This blessedness, he goes on to say, Dante may hope to share; but if he should yield to temptation and rush out of this life in search of her, he will be for ever parted from her:

> How ever shouldst thou see her lovely face
> If any desperate death should once be thine?
> From Justice so condign
> Withdraw thyself even now—that in the end
> Thy heart may not offend
> Against thy soul, which in the holy place
> In heaven, still hopes to see her and to be
> Within her arms. Let this hope comfort thee.
> Look thou into the pleasure, wherein dwells
> Thy lovely Lady, who is in Heaven crowned,
> Who is herself thy hope in Heaven, the while
> To make thy memory hallowed she avails;
> Being a soul within the deep Heaven bound,
> A face on thy heart painted, to beguile
> Thy heart of grief which else should turn it vile.
> Even as she seemed a wonder here below,
> On high she seemeth so—
> Yea, better known, is there more wondrous yet.
> And even as she was met
> First by the Angels with sweet song and smile,
> Thy spirit bears her back upon the wing,
> Which often in those ways is journeying.
> Of thee she entertains the blessèd throngs,
> And says to them, "While yet my body thrave
> On earth, I gat much honour which he gave,
> Commending me in his commended songs."
> Also she asks always of God our Lord
> To give thee peace according to His word.

This exquisite poem throws much light on Dante's love: if we had not its testimony we might think that he

exaggerated when he spoke of the awe and delight that was felt by those who looked on Beatrice; but Cino distinctly affirms that she was a "wonder" so great that she still seemed a wonder when she reached the Celestial Courts, and that her beauty and purity of soul were so intense that the revealing light of heaven only made them appear brighter and more marvellous.

Cino confirms also the statement of Dante, that love was always to him an uplifting influence: "Love, that drew my thoughts from all things vile," he says in the *Vita Nuova*; and this noble and, in his day, unusual view of love, is characteristic of all his subsequent works. It is to this that Cino alludes when he speaks of Beatrice as being Dante's "hope"; the spiritual passion that he cherished for her led him on from height to height, purifying and ennobling him with its transcendent fire. Death, in such an ineffable love as this, was not separation, but union.

For it is remarkable that these two kindred spirits, who were born in the same year, in the same quarter of the same city, who met as children, who shared the same memories and walked the same streets, were yet worlds apart, and lived their lives upon different planes, so that while Dante reveals to us the ardour of his devotion, he records no word that she spoke to him, nor seems to have ventured to utter any word to her. She is to him always a "vision," she passes before his silent gaze, or wafts him a distant salutation, but he has no thought, no wish apparently, that he might be admitted into the close human intercourse of everyday life. But with the touch of death all was changed: Beatrice belonged no more either to the proud and honoured Folco Portinari, or to the gay and gallant young Simone de' Bardi, she was made one of the company of Heaven, and not only Dante,

[*Photograph A. T*

Door of the Church of San Martino, in which Dante was Married to Gemma Donati.

but his friend, Cino da Pistoia, believed that her spirit rested upon her earthly lover, and that their lives were now indissolubly linked. Beatrice speaks of him to the Angels, she waits for his coming to join her, and meanwhile she prays that God may give him peace.

The power of mental concentration, of which Boccaccio speaks in his biography, is exemplified by Dante himself in the *Vita Nuova*:

> On that day which fulfilled the year since my Lady had been made of the citizens of eternal life, remembering me of her as I sat alone, I betook myself to draw the resemblance of an angel upon certain tablets. And while I did thus, chancing to turn my head, I perceived that some were standing beside me to whom I should have given courteous welcome, and that they were observing what I did; also I learned afterwards that they had been there a while before I perceived them. Perceiving whom, I arose for salutation, and said, "Another was present with me."

This is the incident of which Browning writes in *One Word More*:

> You and I would rather see that angel
> Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
> Would we not?—than read a fresh Inferno.
> You and I will never see that picture.
> While he mused on love and Beatrice,
> While he softened o'er his outlined angel,
> In they broke, those "people of importance";
> We and Bice bear the loss for ever.

But if Dante's love for Beatrice was of this all-absorbing nature, so perfect and complete that death could not prevail against it, how was it that any other affection could find a place in his heart? It was, he tells us, while he was engaged in writing a poem for the anniversary of her death that the episode of the Lady of the Window

occurred which he has faithfully recorded in the *Vita Nuova*:

Having sat for some space sorely in thought because of the time that was now past, I was so filled with dolorous imaginings that it became outwardly manifest in my altered countenance. Whereupon, feeling this, and being in dread lest any should have seen me, I lifted mine eyes to look; and then perceived a young and very beautiful lady, who was gazing upon me from a window with a gaze full of pity so that the very sum of pity appeared gathered together in her.

This was not the only time that he saw her, for he goes on to tell of the many times that the tears came into his eyes when he looked upon the pity expressed in her face, and of the comfort that her sympathy brought him, so that at last he began to ask whether he held her too dear:

I began to consider her thus: This lady is young, beautiful, gentle and wise; perchance it was Love himself who set her in my path, that so my life might find peace. And there were times when I thought yet more fondly still until my heart consented unto its reasoning. But when it had so consented, my thought would often turn round upon me, as moved by reason and cause me to say within myself: "What hope is this which would console me after so base a fashion and which hath taken the place of all other imaginings?" Also there was another voice within me that said: "And wilt thou, having suffered so much tribulation through Love, not escape while yet thou mayest from so much bitterness? Thou must surely know that this thought carries with it the desire of Love and drew its life from the gentle eyes of the lady who vouchsafed thee so much pity.

The thought of the Lady at the Window, was, he says, cast out of his mind by the vision of Beatrice, which came to him at the ninth hour of the day—a vision of her as she had been when he first saw her in her ninth year, and by this vision he was recalled to the contemplation of her perfection, for throughout the *Vita Nuova* he associates

the number nine with Beatrice, as expressive of her nearness to the Divine—three, being the number of the Trinity, its multiplication by three signifies the apotheosis of heavenly virtue. This signification he works out elaborately in the *Vita Nuova*, collecting together all the times in her life that the number nine was associated with her, and even adding the fact that when he came to count over his list of the sixty most fair and noble ladies in Florence, he found that her name was the ninth on the roll—a somewhat doubtful compliment, since we should certainly have imagined that it would have had the first place. This recurring nine, he explains by saying: "Three being of itself the Efficient of nine, and the Great Efficient of miracles being of Himself three Persons (to wit, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), which being three are also one—this lady was accompanied by the number nine to the end that men might clearly perceive her to be a nine, that is, a miracle, whose only root is the Holy Trinity."

The Lady at the Window has been the subject of many arguments and disputes; one theory that is frequently put forward is that she was Gemma Donati, whom Dante afterwards married; another, that she is a figurative presentment of Philosophy. In his *Convivio*, Dante gives us his own account of the matter:

> The star of Venus had twice revolved in that circle which causes the evening and morning to appear, according to the two varying seasons, since the death of that blessed Beatrice who lives in Heaven with the Angels and on Earth with my soul; when that gentle Lady of whom I made mention at the end of the *Vita Nuova* first appeared before my eyes accompanied by Love, and assumed a position in my mind. And as has been stated by me in the little book referred to, more because of her gentle goodness than from any choice of mine, it befell that I consented to be her servant. For she appeared

impassioned with such sorrow for my sad, widowed life, that the spirits of my eyes became especially friendly to her; and, so disposed, they then depicted her to be such that my goodwill was content to espouse itself to that image. But because Love is not born suddenly, nor grows great, nor comes to perfection in haste, but desires time and food for thought, especially where there are antagonistic thoughts which impede it, there must needs be, before this new love could be perfect, a great battle between the thought of its food and of that which was antagonistic to it, which still held the fortress of my mind for that glorious Beatrice. For the one was succoured on one side continually by the ever-present vision, and the other on the opposite side by the memory of the past. And the help of the ever-present sight increased every day, which memory could not do, in opposing that which to a certain degree prevented me from turning the face towards the past.*

This might certainly be taken to mean that it was a new and living affection, shortly to lead to marriage, that held Dante's heart, but a few chapters further on in this second treatise of the *Convivio*, we find the Lady of the Window explained as that Philosophy in which he found consolation in his widowed state:

When I had lost the chief delight of my soul in former time, I was left so stung with sadness that no consolation whatever availed me. Nevertheless, after some time, my mind, reasoning with itself to heal itself, took heed, since neither my own nor that of another availed to comfort it, to turn to a method which a certain disconsolate one had adopted when he looked for consolation.

This method was the study of Philosophy:

And as it is wont to be that a man goes seeking for silver and beyond his purpose he finds gold, whose hidden cause appears not perhaps without the Divine Will; I, who sought to console myself, found not only a remedy for my tears, but words of authors and of sciences and of books; reflecting on

* Translated by E. P. Sayer.

which I judged well that Philosophy, who was the Lady of these authors, of these sciences and of these books, might be a supreme thing. And I imagined her in the form of a gentle Lady, and I could imagine her in no other attitude than a compassionate one, because if willingly the sense of Truth beheld her, hardly could it turn away from her. And with this imagination I began to go where she is demonstrated truthfully, that is, to the Schools of the Religious and to the disputations of the Philosophers, so that in a short time, perhaps of thirty months, I began to feel her sweetness so much that my love for her chased away and destroyed all other thought.

Whether the Lady of the Window was a philosophic abstraction or a flesh and blood maiden can never now be decided, but the fact remains that though Dante tells us that his mind ever "dwelt in thought," with his glorified Lady, it was not long after her death that he was married to the daughter of Manetto Donati. He was left "widowed" in 1290, and it was in 1292 or '93 that he gave his hand to another. Boccaccio says that his friends brought about the marriage, hoping thereby to make him forget his sorrow for Beatrice, and that it was a most unhappy one, since it prevented him from continuing his studies, and filled his life with vexatious interruptions. Many writers have copied this statement without adding Boccaccio's comment:

Certainly I do not affirm that these things happened in Dante's case, for I do not know. But at any rate, whether that be the truth or not, once Dante was separated from her who had been given to console him in his grief, he never would come where she was, nor would he ever allow her to come to him.

Having guarded himself as to the former statement, he makes one that is unqualified when he says that the separation of husband and wife was enforced by Dante, and it is certainly not possible to disprove it at this

distance of time. But that Gemma was the inferior and uneducated person represented by some of Dante's biographers, is most unlikely, for the Donati family was on an equality with the Portinari, and the daughters of all such families were carefully instructed in the arts and in the graces of life. They lived together long enough for several children to be born to them, of whom four, at least, lived to grow up. Pietro, the elder son, became a lawyer, and wrote a commentary on his father's great poem; Jacopo, who was with him in his last years, and held two benefices in Ravenna, was also a writer; Antonia and Beatrice both survived their father, but little is known of them except that Beatrice was a nun in the Convent of San Stefano dell' Uliva in Ravenna. That this daughter was called after Beatrice Portinari seems to show that Gemma felt no jealousy on her account, and that she did not follow her husband into exile does not, by itself, prove any want of affection, since at first it would have been impossible for her to take a family of young children on such perilous wanderings, and in later life she may not have had the physical strength to face the perils and fatigues of travel.

These are points which cannot now be cleared up, but in such a heart as Dante's there may well have been room for two loves so totally different. Gemma was his wife, the mother of his children, the sharer of his household cares and pleasures, the type of woman whom Wordsworth portrayed in the lines:

> A creature not too bright or good
> For human nature's daily food.

Beatrice was his guiding star, the inspirer of his genius, the symbol of that Divinity to which he looked up in reverent devotion.

[*Photograph A. T.*

INTERIOR OF SAN MARTINO.

The *Vita Nuova*, as far as any dates can be assigned, was finished at about the time that Dante's marriage took place, and he was now to enter upon a new chapter of his life as a householder, a citizen and an officer of the State; but amid all these interests and occupations, the image of Beatrice was enshrined in his soul and a great purpose was forming itself in his mind.

Of that image and that purpose he speaks in the closing pages of the *Vita Nuova*:

> Beyond the sphere which spreads to widest space
> Now soars the sigh that my heart sends above;
> A new perception born of grieving Love
> Guideth it upward the untrodden ways.
> When it hath reached unto the end, and stays,
> It sees a Lady round whom splendours move
> In homage; till, by the great light thereof
> Abashed, the pilgrim spirit stands at gaze.
> It sees her such, that when it tells me this
> Which it hath seen, I understand it not,
> It hath a speech so subtil and so fine.
> And yet I know its voice within my thought
> Often remembereth me of Beatrice:
> So that I understand it, ladies mine.

After writing this sonnet, it was given unto me to behold a very wonderful vision, wherein I saw things which determined me that I would say nothing further of this most blessed one until such time as I could discourse more worthily concerning her. And to this end I labour all I can, as she well knoweth. Wherefore if it be His pleasure through Whom is the life of all things, that my life continue with me a few years, it is my hope that I shall yet write concerning her what hath not before been written of any woman. After the which may it seem good unto Him who is the Master of Grace that my spirit should go hence to behold the glory of its Lady; to wit, of that blessed Beatrice who now gazeth continually on His countenance *qui est per omnia saecula benedictus. Laus Deo.*

This aspiration—*spero di dire di lei quello che mai non fu detto d' alcuna*—is akin to Milton's hope that he might write something that the world would not willingly let die; both poets passed through a period of intense toil in the midst of civil strife before their wish was fulfilled, but for both it was at last granted in fullest measure—*Paradise Lost* is Milton's eternal monument, and the *Divina Commedia* has not only immortalized Dante himself, but has for ever glorified the name of her who led him up the steeps of light to that highest empyrean where he at last beholds her in the shining company of the Saints of God, crowned with transcendent beauty as the eternal rays of glory reflect themselves in her face.

The Statesman.

The life of action and the life of contemplation are generally considered to be incompatible, and there are even those who maintain that they exercise a harmful influence upon each other—that the man of affairs is made dreamy and unpractical by indulging in contemplation, and the poet or philosopher has his thoughts confused and his high visions obscured by engaging in action.

It is this idea that has made some writers on Dante regret that he should have allowed himself to be drawn into the troubled stream of Florentine politics; had he not closed his books and laid down his pen, they say, he might have lived in peace to the end of a long life, rejoicing in the growing glories of his beloved city, and pouring forth a golden flood of poetry, while the splendid buildings round him came nearer and nearer to completion and the fair flower of Giotto's Campanile rose up into the light; poets and seers are few and far between, but the world is

crowded with politicians—why should Dante have wasted his immortal powers upon fleeting interests?

But when Dante's earlier writings are compared with his later,it is impossible not to feel, as in the case of Milton, that the seeming loss to the world has resulted in overwhelming gain. Milton's country had need of him, and his ungrudging response to the call of duty so strengthened and enriched his mental fibre that the graceful and charming fancy of his early poems was merged in the mighty flow of *Paradise Lost*, while the blindness engendered by his incessant poring over State papers isolated him from the world around him, so that the eyes of his soul might be opened to things unseen.

And what is true of the English poet is true also of the Florentine. If Dante had contented himself with study and contemplation, if he had waved public affairs aside as unworthy of his attention, he must always have been a great poet, but he would not have been the poet of the *Divina Commedia*—the halo of his worship of his lost Lady would still have encircled his brow; but if that worship had not been ennobled and glorified by the use to which he put it for the benefit of mankind, it would surely have faded as the years passed by, it might even have become trivial and commonplace, a mere relic of a dead passion; and though he would no doubt have been surrounded by a court of admirers, Giotto, the kindred soul who had shared his aspirations and sympathised in his ideals, would have sighed to think how far short he had fallen of his early promise.

But such was not to be Dante's fate. Nothing in all the world is quite so dead as a dead passion, but Dante's love for Beatrice was saved from death by a transfiguration which gave it a vivid and vital immortality. His mystic devotion, his bitter grief, might have tempted him to

become the mere laureate of his own feelings, sounding the same notes again and again in endless repetition; but his manhood was of too firm a fibre for such weakness to be possible to him—he made of his love an inspiration, he took the thorn of his sorrow and turned it into a spur.

Milton's work for the State resulted in blindness, Dante's work for Florence resulted in exile; but without that exile we should never have had the *Divina Commedia*. Like Milton, he was completely cut off from the public duties in which he had played such a prominent part—duties which might have claimed him to the end; he had gained all that they could give him—experience, knowledge of men, insight into the secrets of government and statesmanship, and then they were taken from him, and stranded and desolate, he was left to make use of the new stores that filled his mind.

These public duties were many and important; but before he could engage in them, Dante was obliged to enter one of the Guilds, or societies of professional and commercial men, which were part of the integral life of Florence. As a remedy against the power of the nobles—still very great, although their towers had been cut down since the year 1250—a law had been passed that no citizen should be eligible for election to the council unless he was a member of one of the Guilds. This remedy was not, however, so successful a had been hoped, for the nobles hastened to enrol themselves in the various Guilds so as not to let the government of the city pass out of their hands, and in 1292 the democratic party procured the passing of an Order in Council, decreeing that a number of the principal Florentine families should be permanently disqualified from office, with the added regulation that those who were not thus disqualified must be actively occupied in the profession or

trade of the Guild in which they were enrolled, and not merely nominal members.

It was necessary, therefore, for Dante to seek admission to one of the *Arte Maggiore*, or seven greater Guilds—Lawyers, Bankers, Physicians and Apothecaries, and Cloth, Wool, Silk, and Fur Merchants—which alone qualified for office, if he wished to do high service to the State; and since he chose the Guild of the Physicians and Apothecaries, some writers have tried to prove that he practised as a doctor. But though medical works are spoken of as among his books, and the many allusions to disease and sickness in the *Divina Commedia* show his knowledge of such matters, there is no outside evidence of his having followed the calling of a physician, nor would it have been necessary for him to do so, for the Apothecaries Guild included not only medical men, but artists and authors.

It was in the year 1295 that he was admitted, and he is entered in the register as *Dante d'Alighieri, poeta Fiorentino*. Each Guild had its patron saint, and the appropriate patron of the Physicians might have seemed to be St. Luke, but it was the Madonna who was chosen by its members, though her image is not to be found to-day in the niche assigned to it outside the church of Or San Michele. After the fire which destroyed the original church in the 14th century, the Greater and Lesser Guilds joined in the decoration of the new building, and the most celebrated sculptors of the day were employed to make statues of their various patron saints. The Virgin, carved by Simone Ferrucci, at first occupied her proper niche, next to that of St. John the Evangelist, the patron of the Guild of Silk, but in the 17th century a rumour got about that the statue was miraculous and moved its eyes, and such crowds collected to watch it

20236

that it was deemed wiser to move it into the church for safety.

The archives of Florence contain several records of Dante's part in affairs of State, and that he was quick to use his new powers is shown by the appearance of his name among the voters for the election of a new Prior in December, 1295, while even before that date he had spoken in a debate concerning some re-arrangements in the Order regulating the power of the nobles.

That his financial resources were not in the soundest condition at this time is shown by several entries in the records of the city. In April, 1297, he and his half-brother Francesco, are mentioned as obtaining a loan from one of their fellow-citizens, and a still larger one was raised in December of the same year. In the next year he borrowed again, his father-in-law, Manetto Donati, standing surety for him, and further loans are mentioned in 1299 and 1300, the latter being dated June 11, only four days before his election as Prior is notified. It was not until the year 1332, when he had been dead eleven years, that the last of these liabilities was paid off by his sons, Pietro and Jacopo, and his brother, Francesco. Why he was involved in these difficulties there is nothing to show, but there must have been some satisfactory explanation, as otherwise he would not have been allowed to hold the office of Prior. Leonardo Bruni speaks of him as a man who though not wealthy, could not be considered poor, "he had a small patrimony, sufficient to admit of comfortable living. He owned good houses in Florence, adjoining those of Gieri di Messer Bello, his kinsman; property in Camerata, Piacenza, and in the plain of Ripoli."

But whether rich or poor, it is clear that Dante was highly esteemed by his fellow citizens, and that he was a

[*Photograph A. T.*

COURTYARD OF THE BARGELLO.

marked man in the State of Florence. Boccaccio gives a glowing account of the honour in which he was held in the Council Chamber: "Fortune was so favourable to him that no Legation was heard or answered, nor in short was any important deliberation entered upon, until Dante had first given his opinion relative thereto. On him all public faith, all hope, and, in a word, all things human and divine seemed to rest." This statement may be a little too highly coloured, but there are records which prove that the Florentines felt that their interests might be safely entrusted to him. In May, 1300, the archives of San Gemignano contain an entry concerning the mission of "the noble Dante Alighieri, ambassador of the Commonwealth of Florence," who came to explain the scheme for a joint parliament of the cities belonging to the Tuscan League. His explanations were evidently well received, for the entry ends by saying that the scheme was approved and ratified by the Council.

It may seem surprising that this ardent lover and profound scholar should have been so successful in the active affairs of life, and Leonardo Bruni touches upon this point in his *Vita di Dante*: "In appearance," he says, "he was of noble bearing, graceful and dignified, with an agreeable countenance. He spoke rarely and slowly, and was very subtil in his answers. And although he was a scholar, he did not therefore withdraw himself from the world, but associated freely with other young men and excelled in their exercises. And it is wonderful how, though he was always studying, yet he never seemed to do so, but lived pleasantly with all his companions."

It was from the members of the seven Greater Arts, or Guilds, that the Priors of the Republic were chosen, and since the Guild of Apothecaries was among these, Dante was eligible for election. Twelve Priors held office

each year, two months being the term of service, and two Priors serving at the same time. Dante was one of those chosen to serve for the year 1300, and it was during his two months of office that the disturbances between the rival factions in the city led to the banishment of some of the leaders. Among these was Guido Cavalcanti, Dante's friend and fellow poet, and it is a proof of the impartiality of his justice that he performed a duty which must have cost him almost as dear as the condemnation of his sons cost the Roman Brutus. Exiled to Sarzana, Guido's health failed rapidly; and though he was allowed to return to Florence, he died in the August of this year. It was soon after this that Dante was sent to Rome with two other ambassadors to plead the cause of the Bianchi, or party of the White Guelfs, with Pope Boniface the Eighth. Of this visit nothing is recorded, unless it be in the description of the swarming throngs of sinners (*Inferno*, XVIII.), whom he likens to the pilgrims in the Jubilee year, 1300, crossing the Bridge of St. Angelo.

> E'en thus the Romans, when the year returns
> Of Jubilee, with better speed to rid
> The thronging multitudes, their means devise
> For such as pass the bridge; that on one side
> All front towards the castle, and approach
> S. Peter's Fane, on th' other towards the Mount.

The embassy was unsuccessful, for Boniface was in no mood to listen either to Bianchi or Neri, and was already negotiating with Charles of Valois, brother of Philip the Fair, King of France, to act as arbiter in their quarrel.

In the year 1301 there are several mentions of Dante in the Florentine archives; he took part in a debate in April on certain changes to be made in the election of the Priors, and at the end of the same month we find him appointed to overlook some alterations in the approaches

to the Bargello, so that the common people may more easily "have access to the Lord Priors." In June he took part in a debate on the demands of the Pope for a troop of Florentine soldiers to aid his army in Sicily, on which occasion he advised that nothing should be done in the matter; in September his vote is recorded several times in minutes of Council meetings, and at the end of the month all mention of him ceases.

Boccaccio, however, takes up the story. In that autumn the startling news reached Florence that Charles of Valois, brother of the French King, Philip the Fair, was to come to the city as the Pope's arbiter, and Boccaccio describes the consequent alarm:

> All the chiefs of the party to which Dante belonged were assembled in Council to look to this matter, and there among other things they provided that an embassy should be sent to the Pope in order to persuade him to oppose the coming of the said Charles or to make him come with the consent of the ruling party. When they came to consider who should be the head of this embassy, all agreed on Dante. To their request he replied after quietly meditating on it for awhile: "If I go, who stays? And if I stay, who goes?" as if he alone was of worth among them all, and as if the others were nothing worth except as he made them so.

The remark, as it stands, sounds arrogant, but the Pope evidently considered Dante the most important of the three ambassadors, for Dino Compagni says in his Chronicle that he received them privately, and after reasoning with them, sent Corazza da Signa and Maso di Minerbetti back to Florence, retaining Dante for further conference. It is quite possible that the conference was only a pretext for keeping him away from Florence till Charles had had time to accomplish his purpose; but even if this was so, it is a proof of the influence that

Boniface believed Dante to possess; his object was to draw the free city of Florence into the grasp of the Papacy, and in all probability it was fear of Dante's power of swaying the opinions of men that made him anxious to keep him away from the scene of action.

But if Dante belonged to the Guelf party, why should Boniface fear that his influence would be used against the Papal power?

To answer this question, it is necessary to keep in mind the varying fortunes of the rival parties. The struggle between Guelfs and Ghibellines was no new one, it had taken its rise long years before Dante's day in the jealousy between the Holy Roman See and the Holy Roman Empire. The Emperor was chosen by certain Princes who bore the title of Electors; and if he had been content to declare himself a dependent of the Pope, with an election confirmed by him and an authority derived from him, all might have gone smoothly. But the Holy Roman Emperors were not so willing—once on the throne they claimed a Divine Right on their own account, and were tenacious of their prerogative to the last degree. Two parties therefore arose in Europe, and from their hostility unnumbered troubles sprang; they were not at first known by the names so familiar to us to-day, but at the battle of Weinsberg, in 1140, the Emperor Conrad's troops rallied themselves on the field with the cry of "Weiblingen! Weiblingen!" the name of one of the Hohenstauffen estates near to Augsburg; the Papal troops replying with cries of "Welf! Welf!" the family name of the Bavarian princes who were leading them. It was from these Bavarian ancestors that our British Royal Family derived their surname—an anomaly rectified in our own day by the wisdom of King George the Fifth.

It was not until some time later that the names were introduced into Italy, and when they did come, the Italians shaped them into sounds more suited to their tongues—Weiblingen became Ghibelline; and Welf, Guelf; and it is under these designations that the two parties have come down to us through the centuries.

The organised strife between Guelfs and Ghibellines in Italy is generally stated to have begun about the time that the Lombard League was formed against the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, in 1167; but this strife, while it set the cities one against the other, did not at first involve them in internal factions—Venice adhered to the Pope, Genoa to the Emperor—and so on throughout the whole country.

But though this state of things was bad enough, worse was to follow, for the cities gradually became divided against themselves, some of the great families espoused the Guelf cause, some the Ghibelline, the fiercest passions were aroused, buildings were destroyed, treasures of art were burned, and the streets ran with blood. To us, looking back upon these struggles through the perspective of the centuries, they seem worse than useless. Freedom and prosperity lay in the hands neither of the Guelfs nor the Ghibellines, and the subjugation of the one by the other would have resulted in no particular benefit to the world: why all this violence? we are tempted to cry; why all this waste of energy, this greed, this jealousy, this aggression? If all this mental fervour, this physical energy, had been used for production instead of destruction, Italy might have been filled with still greater treasures than she possesses to-day, and in still richer measure she might have been the joy of the whole earth.

The regret is a reasonable one, but we in the twentieth century have no right to reproach the thirteenth for its

waste of human life, of human powers; we are the heirs of the ages, yet we have seen the flower of our young manhood choked with poison gas, noble buildings and treasures of art and learning destroyed, fair country-sides ravaged with bombs and shells. Freedom and prosperity are not achieved by such means as these; and Dante, with his marvellous powers of prophetic vision, grasped the truth that violence is bound to recoil upon the head of those who use it to attack the possessions of others.

But to revert to the original question: if Dante was born a Guelf, how was it that he became a Ghibelline? The change in his opinions has sometimes caused him to be accused of inconsistency, but there is an inconsistency that is in reality the highest form of constancy, and such an inconsistency was his. It was not the triumph of the Papal power for which he longed, for which he strove, it was the triumph of his country—of a United Italy—through the influence of the Papal power. These high hopes faded as time went on; and with that same goal ever before his eyes he transferred his allegiance to the Ghibellines, hoping that the Emperor might succeed where the Pope had failed.

This is no inconsistency, it is constancy of the noblest kind; and when one disappointment after another convinced him that the Ghibellines—no more than the Guelfs—could or would heal the divisions that were tearing unhappy Italy asunder, he withdrew from party strife altogether, separating himself from his fellow exiles who were plotting and scheming for their return, since their violence and their frenzy so revolted him that he felt the only becoming course for him was to take his stand apart. (*Paradiso*, Canto XVII.)

The date that Dante assigns to the outbreak of internecine strife in Florence is 1215, when the fatal quarrel

took place between the Amidei and Buondelmonte families, to which he alludes in the *Paradiso* (Canto XVI.)

> O Buondelmonte, what ill counselling
> Prevailed on thee to break that plighted bond?
> Many, who now are weeping, would rejoice,
> Had God to Ema given thee, the first time
> Thou near our city camest. But so was doomed,
> Florence! on that maimed stone which guards the bridge
> The victim, when thy peace departed, fell.

The "plight" broken by Buondelmonte was the marriage contract between himself and a daughter of the house of Amidei, and Machiavelli gives a clear and detailed account of the affair in his *History of Florence.*

After describing the conflicts between the Papal and Imperial Powers, he says:

Nevertheless the Florentines maintained unity among themselves until 1215, submitting to the conqueror of the moment and seeking the protection of no other power. Yet, as our bodily infirmities are the more dangerous and fatal the later they appear, even so Florence, the more backward she was in imitating Italian intrigues, the more severely was she punished through them. The causes which led to the first and most noted division, since they have been recounted by Dante and many other celebrated writers, must only be briefly retailed by me. There were in Florence, among other very powerful families, the Buondelmonte and the Uberti, of whom the Amidei and the Donati were neighbours. In the family of the Donati there was a rich widow, who had one daughter of surpassing beauty. This lady had in her own mind intended to marry the girl to Messer Buondelmonte, a young cavalier, chief of the house of Buondelmonte; but whether through negligence or procrastination she had never made her intention known. His family, meanwhile, had arranged a marriage between him and a daughter of the Amidei, whereat the lady was much displeased and resolved with the aid of her daughter's beauty to upset the marriage before it should be celebrated. On seeing Messer Buondelmonte one day approaching her house alone, she came down

from her chamber, bringing her daughter with her, and as the young man was passing, advanced to meet him, saying, "I am rejoiced truly that you have chosen a wife, although I had reserved this my daughter for you," and she pushed open the door that he might see her. The cavalier saw the exquisite beauty of the girl, and knowing that her birth and dowry were not inferior to that of her to whom he was affianced, became so inflamed with passion to possess her that, recking nothing of his plighted word or of the wrong he would do in breaking it, or of the troubles that would gather round him through his breach of faith, exclaimed, "Since you have kept her for me, I should be ungrateful to refuse, there being yet time." Without delay the marriage was celebrated, and this affair, once it was known, enraged the houses of the Amidei and of the Uberti, who were akin to them, and at a family council attended by many others who were related to them, they decided that this injury could not be submitted to without disgrace, nor be expiated by any other penalty than the death of Messer Buondelmonte. Whilst some discoursed of the evils that might ensue, Mosca Lamberti said: "He who considers everything will never do anything," quoting that old and fatal line—*Cosa fatta, capo ha.* Upon this, they placed the killing of Messer Buondelmonte in the hands of Mosca, Stiatta Uberti, Lambertuccio Amidei and Oderigo Fifanti, who, meeting on the morning of Easter Day, 1215, at the house of the Amidei, posted themselves between the Ponte Vecchio and San Stefano, where presently Messer Buondelmonte, as he was crossing the bridge on a white horse, and possibly thinking that it was just as easy to forget an injury as to break a promise, was attacked by them at the foot of the bridge and killed beneath the statue of Mars. This murder threw the whole city into turmoil, part joining the Buondelmonte, and part the Uberti. Being strong in houses, fortresses and men, the two families contended for many years without either prevailing against the other, and from time to time their feuds, albeit never extinguished by peace, were suspended by truce, and thus, according to circumstances, they subsided for a time and then flared out afresh. Florence submitted to these troubles until the time of Frederick the Second, who, persuading himself that because he was King of Naples he could increase his strength against the

Church and so consolidate his power in Tuscany, favoured the Uberti and their following, until with his help they drove out the Buondelmonte, and thus, even as all Italy had been divided before, so now our city also came to divide into Guelf and Ghibelline.*

Machiavelli goes on to narrate the efforts after peace, by means of which the two parties agreed to lay aside their mutual distrust and to take mutual measures for self-defence on the death of Frederick (1250). They made a fresh division of the city, appointing magistrates, and decreeing that two foreign judges should be called in to administer justice, one to be called the Captain of the Popolani, and the other the Podestà. Great prosperity followed, and Florence might have become the most powerful State in Italy if jealousy had not once more sprung up within her walls, owing to the fact that the Guelfs were stronger than the Ghibellines—"either because the latter were hated by the people for their haughty carriage during their predominance in the time of Frederick, or because the ecclesiastical party was more popular than the imperial, because with the aid of the Church the Florentines hoped to preserve their liberties, whilst under the Emperor they feared to lose them. Wherefore the Ghibellines, perceiving that their influence was declining, could not rest, and only awaited an opportunity to seize the reins of government."

Then, just at the time of Dante's birth, came their conspiracy with Manfred, the son of Frederick, which ended in the subjugation of Florence to his power, a proceeding which roused the fury of the city against the Ghibellines and resulted in fresh struggles and conflicts. These disturbances, in their turn, passed away, and by the time that Dante had entered upon his civic duties, Florence had again—as in all her periods of peace—

* Translated by W. K. Marriott.

reached a high degree of prosperity, the Government was put upon a sound basis, the merchants extended their trade into far countries, the foundations of the Cathedral, the Palazzo Vecchio and other important buildings were laid, and a fair promise seemed to open out for the future.

But at this point we come to the quarrel which made a further division in the political camps of Florence, so that the names of Guelf and Ghibelline were merged for a time in those of Bianchi and Neri. To find the cause of this new element of strife, we must turn to the history of Pistoia, a city which had already had many fierce contests with Florence and had at times been subject to her larger and more powerful neighbour.

"Among the first families in Pistoia," says Machiavelli, "was that of the Cancellieri, and one day, Lore, the son of Messer Guglielmo, and Geri, the son of Bertaccio, both of this family, were playing together when Geri was slightly hurt by Lore. This accident displeased Lore's father, Messer Guglielmo, who, thinking that a little humility would avert further trouble, ordered his son to go to the house of the wounded lad's father and ask his pardon. Lore obeyed his father; nevertheless this considerate act only increased the trouble, and in no degree softened the harsh temper of Messer Bertaccio, for he ordered his servants to lay hold of Lore and cut off his hand; and as if for greater spite he had it done upon a manger. He then said to the lad, 'Go back to your father and tell him that wounds can only be cured by wounds, not by words.' The cruelty of this deed so enraged Messer Guglielmo that he took up arms for revenge, and Messer Bertaccio also armed in his own defence, and not only did these families fight, but the whole city of Pistoia became embroiled in the quarrel. As it happened that the two Cancellieri were descended

from a Messer Cancelliere who had married two wives, the name of the one being Bianca, so the partisans of the man who was son of this lady were called Bianchi, whilst the others, in order that they might have an opposite name, were called Neri. Many fights occurred and much loss of life and destruction of property; and wearying of this, yet unable to bring it to an end, they determined to embroil others in it, and with this view they carried their discords to Florence. Here the Neri, owing to their intimacy with the Donati, were assisted by Messer Corso, the head of the family, whilst the Bianchi, to obtain support against the Donati, had recourse to Messer Veri de' Cerchi, a man in every way the equal of Messer Corso."

The situation in Florence was now much worse than it had been before, for not only were the Guelfs still the rivals of the Ghibellines, but they themselves were split into two hostile groups, and feeling ran so high that it needed but a spark to set the whole city on fire.

"It was in the month of May (1300)," says Machiavelli, "when all Florence makes holiday in the streets, that some young men on horseback, among whom were the Donati, and their friends, stopped to watch some girls dancing near the Church of Santa Trinità, when suddenly some of the Cerchi—also accompanied by many nobles—rode up, and not knowing that the Donati were in front of them, and desiring also to see the dancing, spurred their horses among the people, some of whom were injured. The Donati took affront at this, and drew their swords, to which challenge the Cerchi boldly responded; after many wounds given and received on both sides, the combatants were parted. This affray was the first of many, because all the city joined in the quarrel, people as well as nobles, and the two parties took the names of Bianchi and Neri.

The Cerchi were leaders of the Bianchi party, many of the citizen families also joining them, together with all the Florentine Ghibellines."

It would not have been possible for Dante to keep out of this quarrel, even if he had wished to do so, for both Cerchi and Donati had been his neighbours from boyhood in the Sesto San Pietro—the *Sesto dello Scandalo*, as Villani calls it, since it was the ward in which the disturbance began. But though his early associations bound him to the Guelfs, and though his marriage to Gemma Donati united him with her family, it was towards the Bianchi, led by the Cerchi, that his sympathies inclined him; and since their policy was more akin to that of the Ghibellines than to that of the Guelfs, he was now thrown more and more with the party to which at first he had been opposed, a fact that must be kept in mind when we come to consider his political activities after his banishment.

But although to some extent a partisan at this time, it is evident that he did not lose sight of his responsibilities as one of the Council, for Machiavelli tells us that "finding both parties remained under arms, the *Signori*, among whom was Dante, by whose prudence and counsel they were largely guided, decided to arm the people and to reinforce them with men from the surrounding country, and by these forces they compelled the Bianchi and Neri to lay down their arms."

But though a truce had thus been made, the *Signori* of Florence were not deluded into thinking that *truce* and *peace* were synonymous terms; if the Pope could be induced to discourage faction instead of fomenting it, there was, however, some hope for the future, and negotiations were set on foot which seemed to justify that hope. But this dawn of promise was only too soon to

[*Photograph A. T.*

Chapel of the Bargello, showing the Frescoed Portraits.

prove fallacious. What we should call double-dealing, Boniface called prudent care for the interests of the Church; for the internal peace of Florence he cared not at all, that Florence should be subservient to the Papal power he cared with all his heart and soul, and for this end he instructed Charles of Valois to wear the guise of a mediator, while his real object was subjugation. His arrival in Florence is described by Hugh Capet in the twentieth Canto of the *Purgatorio*, where Dante says that he came without weapons, but bearing secretly the lance of Judas the betrayer, with which he smote Florence to the inmost quick of her being. The Neri were favoured, as being the party most inclined to serve the Pope; the Bianchi were cast out, since they were more and more inclining towards the Ghibellines; and by the time that Charles left Florence in April, 1302, he had not only enriched himself with a wealth of spoil, but he had made Boniface the virtual master of the city.

Dante was still in Rome, detained there by the Pope, but apparently he expected shortly to return to his home and family and to his State duties ; but when he heard of Charles' betrayal and of the triumph of the Neri, the whole aspect of affairs was changed. Now that the Papal sway was established in Florence, Boniface had no further object in preventing Dante's departure from Rome, but the poet-patriot's influence was too powerful for any risks to be run by the Neri; and though he was permitted to set out on his journey, it was only to find that the gates of the city were closed against him.

How greatly Dante was feared by the Neri is shown by the fact that he was sentenced to exile on three separate occasions; on the 27th of January, 1302, four decrees of banishment were issued by "the noble and powerful soldier, the Lord Cante Gabriele, Podestà of Florence," the second

name on the list being that of "Dante Alighieri, of the Sesto San Piero." The accusation made against him was that during his term of office as Prior he had opposed the coming of Charles of Valois, and also that he had been guilty of *baratteria*, that is, of making gain for himself out of his State offices. The first charge Dante evidently looked upon as an honour, for he alludes to the coming of Charles as a disaster to Florence; as for the second charge he passed it by in scornful silence, and Boccaccio tells us expressly that he had committed neither "offence nor crime"; and that it was for "no rightful cause" that he was cast out of the city; while Giovanni Villani, a contemporary of Dante, and one who had himself held the office of Prior, so that he was doubly qualified to act as witness, says that his only fault was that he belonged to the party over which the Neri had triumphed, and this opinion has been accepted by all those who came after him.

This first sentence ordained that Dante should be fined five thousand gold florins, to be paid within three days; that in default of payment his possessions should be burned or confiscated; while if he did pay, he was still to be forbidden to enter Tuscany for the space of two years. Since he was already prevented from re-entering Florence, he had no opportunity of paying the fine, and in the following March, a second sentence was passed confirming the first, and adding that as he had shown himself "contumacious" he was to be burnt alive if he should venture to return—*igne comburatur sic quod moriatur*. His house, and all his possessions, were now given over to the populace to be plundered, and in April of the same year he was included in the decree by which the whole of the leading members of the Bianchi were banished. Dino Compagni, in his Chronicle, gives a list

of the principal exiles, and includes among them "Dante Alighieri, ambassador at Rome."

Boccaccio gives the following particulars in his Life of the poet:

Dante having in this manner been expelled from that city of which he was not only a citizen, but one of its greatest ornaments, and having left his wife, together with the rest of his family, who, from their tender age, were not fitted for flight, felt little anxiety on her account, because he knew that she was related by ties of blood to the chiefs of the adverse party (the Donati). Uncertain about himself, now here and now there, he went wandering through Tuscany. His wife had saved some small part of his possessions, under the title of her dowry, from the fury of the citizens; and having kept this with a great deal of trouble, she, with good management, maintained herself and their little children upon it. On this account, he, poor and unused to labour, was obliged to seek for his own support.

The misfortunes of Dante's old teacher, Brunetto Latini, must have come back to his mind now, for Latini, as an ambassador of the Guelfs, had been unsuccessful in his mission to implore aid from the king of Castille against Manfred and the Ghibellines; banished in 1260, he says in his *Tesoretto* that as he was returning from Spain, he met a scholar of Bologna and asked him of news from Tuscany, to which the scholar replied:

Ch' i Guelfi di Fiorenza,
Per mala providenza,
E per forza di guerra
Eran fuor della terra,
E' l dannagio era forte
Di prigione e di morte.

(That the Guelfs of Florence
By evil chance
And by force of War,
Were driven from the land,
And the damage was great
Of prison and of death.)

Party strife had always been repugnant to Dante; it was Florence herself that he loved, and it afflicted him to see how her prosperity was sacrificed to these perpetual rivalries; Charles of Valois was only one of the many who interfered disastrously in her affairs; but since it was under his brief sway that the sentence of exile was pronounced, Dante had special cause to remember him. We find him mentioned again in the *Inferno* (Canto VI.), where the poet in his journey through the Third Circle of Hell meets with Ciacco, a well-known citizen of Florence, and asks him if the future of the "divided city" has been revealed to him, and if any Just One shall arise to heal her strifes. Ciacco replies that, on the contrary, new and fiercer discords will follow, and that "the borrowed force" of a stranger will raise the Neri to such a pinnacle of power that they will be able to chase the Bianchi out of Florence That the statement is thrown into the form of a prediction makes it confusing at first, but the action of the *Divina Commedia* is supposed to take place in the year 1300, when Dante had not yet suffered banishment.

But though the "borrowed force" of Charles of Valois might prevail against him, no stranger could stab the heart of Dante with so fierce a pang as those whom he loved, and among whom he had spent his life; "It was thou, my own familiar friend in whom I trusted!" cried the Psalmist of old, and the cry is echoed in Dante's anguished question—*Popule mi, quid feci tibi?* ("My people, what have I done to thee?"). That he would never again enter Florence was a thought not likely to cross his mind in the first moments of his exile, but the fact that the city to which he had dedicated all his powers of body, soul and spirit, should cast him out of her gates, branded with the names of traitor and defrauder, was worse to him than

death itself. His hopes for the Unity of Italy, his plans for the good of Florence, were dashed to the ground—discord, strife, self-seeking, cupidity—all the evils most abhorrent to him, had gained the upper hand, and darkness and despair took possession of his soul.

And yet, so little can finite man see the results of his actions, the very foes who accomplished Dante's downfall, were laying the foundations of his immortality. Had he remained in Florence he would have continued to work for the State, and so working, he must have been ceaselessly embroiled in its party strifes; the Chronicles of Villani and of Dino Compagni show that the city was a seething mass of rivalry and contention through all the years between Dante's exile and his death, and that every statesman and every prominent citizen, without exception, was caught up into the whirlpool of that fruitless turmoil. From this fate Dante was saved by the decree that seemed to him to be so cruel; like St. John of old, a Patmos awaited him in his exile—his eyes might no more be gladdened by the sight of the earthly city that he had loved so well, but a vision of gates of pearl and streets of gold was vouchsafed to him—the vision of that Eternal City whose Builder and Maker is God.

[*Photograph A. T.*

The Giusti Gardens in Verona, with Trees more than Five Hundred Years Old.

Part II.

Exile and Wanderer.

> Yea, thou shalt learn how salt his food who fares
> Upon another's bread, how steep his path
> Who treadeth up and down another's stairs.
> *Paradiso*, Canto XVII. 58.

In a letter written by Dante, which is quoted by Leonardo Bruni, he says that all his subsequent trials and woes might be traced to the time of his Priorate; his wisdom, he adds, may not have been sufficient for the task, but he cannot accuse himself of any want of fidelity—(*del quale Priorato benchè per prudenza non fussi degno, nientedimeno per fede e per età non ne era indegno*).

It must certainly have seemed most unjust to him that he should have shared in the expulsion of the Bianchi, for during his term of office he had shown strict impartiality, and, as we have seen, had joined with his fellow Prior in banishing leading members of both parties. It can scarcely be doubted that the true cause of his downfall was the enmity of Pope Boniface. Early in 1300 three Florentines had been found guilty of conspiracy against the State, and since they were in the Pope's pay he ordered their sentence to be revoked. On the very day that Dante became Prior, June 15, he was called upon to confirm the sentence, and as a result, the Pope's Legate, Cardinal Matteo d'Acquasparta, returned to Rome, leaving Florence under the ban of excommunication. Later on, it is true, Boniface consented to receive Dante with the other Ambassadors, but such an

insult was not likely to be forgotten; and since Charles of Valois was merely a Papal puppet, it was a simple matter to ensure the ruin of Dante's political career.

Dino Compagni states that the number of exiles amounted to six hundred; he mentions several whole families—the Cerchi, the Uberti, the Abati—and includes Dante's name in a list of State officials. Dante's companions in misfortune were therefore a large body, possessed for the most part of much influence and ability, and it was natural that their first thought should be how best to win their way back to Florence that they might regain their confiscated property and re-establish themselves in power. For this purpose they met at Arezzo and elected twelve of their number, of whom Dante was one, to act as a council. The part that he took in the discussions is not recorded, but the decision arrived at was that violence must be met by violence, and that their best chance was to collect all possible forces and make an attack upon the city. The details of the plan were settled and a meeting held in the church of San Godenzo in June; Alessandro da Romena was appointed Captain of the forces, but the exiles did not feel themselves strong enough to attack Florence alone, and Dante was entrusted with a mission to Verona to ask for help.

It was Bartolommeo della Scala who then ruled over that most lovely of cities on the banks of the Adige, the Bartolommeo who appears in *Romeo and Juliet* under the name of Prince Escalus. The tragic feud between the rival houses of Montecchi and Cappelletti—Montague and Capulet, as Shakespeare anglicises them—came to a head about the time of Dante's visit, and it is possible that the Italian poet may have seen that heroine of unhappy love who seems to us so completely the creation of our English dramatist. It is certain, in any case, that

the strife between the families made a deep impression upon his mind, for he mentions them by name in the *Purgatorio* as being "sunk in grief" at the result of their quarrel (Canto VI.).

Alberto della Scala had died two years before this date, leaving three sons, of whom the eldest, Bartolommeo, succeeded him; he was already near the end of his brief reign when Dante came to his court, for he died in 1304, and was succeeded by his two younger brothers, Alboine and Can Grande, who ruled jointly, though in the case of the latter the authority can only have been nominal, for Dante says that he was a child of nine years old when the *Divina Commedia* has its date, i.e. 1300.

This mention of him is prophetic in form; Cacciaguida, Dante's great ancestor, tells him when they meet in the sphere of Mars,—*Paradiso*, Canto XVII.—of the sufferings he must undergo in the next years of his life, and says that his first refuge in his exile will be the Lombard city whose coat of arms was a ladder with a bird perched upon it (the arms of the Scala family), where he shall receive a courteous welcome from the ruler:

> First refuge thou must find, first place of rest,
> In the great Lombard's courtesy, who bears
> Upon the ladder perched, the sacred bird.
> He shall behold thee with such kind regard,
> That 'twixt ye two, the contrary to that
> Which falls 'twixt other men, the granting shall
> Outrun the asking. With him shalt thou see
> That mortal, who was at his birth imprest
> So strongly from this star, that of his deeds
> The nations shall take note. His unripe age
> Yet holds him from observance; for these wheels
> Only nine years have compassed him about.

Can Grande was indeed a gallant son of Mars, but his deeds belong to a later time in Dante's wanderings; at

this period he was only a child in his brother's palace, a child whose charm and gaiety may well have brought a ray of sunshine into the sad heart of the exile, separated from his own sons and from his little Beatrice.

Verona is a city which has passed through such numberless vicissitudes that it is a fitting symbol of the whole history of Italy. Etruscans, Gauls, Romans, Germans, Lombards, and Venetians, all in turn have held sway over this spot of earth, and all as they passed have left traces of their occupation, exhibiting in miniature the alternating prosperity and decay of the country, its subjugations and its eventual emancipation.

To walk on the banks of the Adige when the sun is setting is to be transported into a scene of almost more than earthly beauty; the winding river reflects the glow of the sky and rolls its waves of crimson and gold under the grey walls of the town, while on the opposite height rises the Castello San Pietro, the ancient fortress of the German Theoderic, which, though destroyed by Napoleon, was restored by the Austrians in 1849. Few cities, indeed, have more of beauty, more of historic interest, than Verona possesses, and the ruling house of the Scaligeri was not unworthy of its inheritance, for in those days of fierce struggle between Guelf and Ghibelline—when towns and provinces changed hands as quickly as counters in a game, when populations were decimated and whole country-sides laid waste—the Scaligeri in a lesser degree did for Verona what the Medici were afterwards to do for Florence, protecting it by their powerful sway, and raising it to an eminence that it had never known before. It was in 1260 that they first came into public notice, when Mastino della Scala was elected Podestà; two years later he was made Captain of the People, and from that time until 1389, when Gian Galeazzo

Visconti of Milan attacked and conquered Verona, the city was governed by the della Scala family.

Bartolommeo did not come to the help of the exiles, but that Dante was grateful for the personal kindness shown to him, we can well believe; Florence had banished him, Verona received him; the rulers with whom he had laboured spurned and rejected him, the Prince upon whom he had no claim threw open his gates and took him in. But though the kindness may have consoled him, it could not heal his wound. The grief that he had felt when Beatrice denied him her salutation was an imaginative sorrow, delicious in its pangs; his despair at her death had been soothed by the sense that her spirit was still near him, and by the hope of writing something in her praise that should bring her honour in the sight of all men. But the griefs that rent him now were very different from these earlier woes; laying aside his dreams, he had toiled terribly for his fellow citizens, he had been torn by party strife and stained with the dust and soil of jealousy and recrimination, of envied power and undeserved disgrace. And in return for all this, he was shut out for ever from his beloved Florence, his toil and his sufferings had resulted in nothing but his own banishment, and it is not to be wondered at that for the first year or two of his exile he should have spent his time in plots and counterplots, in fervid conferences with his companions in misfortune, and in passionate attempts to persuade some friendly despot to come to their aid.

Florence, meanwhile, was no quieter for the banishment of the Bianchi leaders, and in 1304 the Pope sent his Legate, Nicolò da Prato, to settle its disorders. Nicolò's secret sympathies were with the Ghibellines, and consequently with the Bianchi, seeing that they were more Ghibelline than Guelf—and he was therefore desirous

of bringing back the exiles; to further this end he re-established the Brotherhoods of the People, so as to decrease the power of the nobles, and as soon as he thought that he had the citizens behind him he proposed that the sentence of banishment should be revoked. Contrary to his hopes and expectations, however, the citizens were no more in favour of this proposal than the nobles, and enraged and disappointed he went back to Rome, leaving Florence once more in a state of excommunication.

But disappointed though he was, the Legate had not altogether abandoned his scheme; telling the Pope that the only way to settle the strifes of Florence was to summon the leaders to Rome and deliver judgment himself, he sent a private message to the exiles as soon as the deputation had started, that now was their chance of getting back into the city.

"Then it was," says Machiavelli, "that a most remarkable thing happened, for these men who so short a time before had fought for the restoration of exiles when unarmed and pleading for permission to return to their country, now, when they saw those same exiles with arms in their hands, attempting to seize the city by force, joined the other citizens in expelling them."

The attacking force managed to get as far as the Piazza of San Giovanni, "but God saved the city," says Villani, who, great as was his admiration for Dante, had no wish to see the Bianchi again in power.

But although Dante wrote a letter to Niccolò da Prato, thanking him for his attempt to aid the Bianchi, he was not one of those who sought to return to Florence by force. A very brief experience of plots and conspiracies was enough to convince him that they were an unworthy channel for his energies, and in the seventeenth Canto

of the *Paradiso*, he puts his own opinion into the mouth of Cacciaguida, in the form of a prediction:

> That shall gall thee most,
> Will be the worthless and vile company
> With whom thou must be thrown into these straits.
> For all ungrateful, impious all, and mad,
> Shall turn 'gainst thee: but in a little while
> Theirs and not thine, shall be the crimsoned brow,
> Their course shall so evince their brutishness
> To have ta'en thy stand apart shall well become thee.

Dante's mind was one which always saw both sides of a question and the faults and failings of Bianchi as well as Neri were apparent to him; if he had had the power he would have chosen to unite the finer spirits of both factions so that rival interests might be subordinated to the good of the State. Since this was not possible, he broke away from the Ghibellines, as he had before broken away from the Guelfs, and declared that for the future he should be "a party by himself alone." His heart was bitter with the sense of failure, but the seeming failure was but another stepping-stone to his future triumph; had the early conspiracies proved successful, he would have once more been drawn into the vortex of politics, his despairing resolve to cut himself adrift from them left him free for the true work of his life. Of the length of this first visit to Verona, there is no record, nor is there any detailed account of his further wanderings. The date of his sojourn in the Lunigiana valley which lies between the Genoese and Tuscan territories, is fixed by the allusion to his host, the Marchese Malaspina, in the eighth Canto of the *Purgatorio*. Dante meets Corrado Malaspina, the father of his friend, and says to him:

> In your domains, I answered, ne'er was I,
> But, through all Europe, where do those men dwell
> To whom their glory is not manifest?

> The fame that honours your illustrious house
> Proclaims the nobles and proclaims the land;
> So that he knows it who was never there.

To which eulogy Corrado replies:

> Seven times the tired sun
> Revisits not the couch, which with four feet
> The forkèd Aries covers, ere that kind
> Opinion shall be nailed into thy brain
> With stronger nails than other's speech can drive.

That is to say, that in seven years from the year 1300, the date of the poem, he will see for himself the glory of the illustrious house whose fame has reached his ears.

In the twenty-fourth Canto of the *Purgatorio* there is an allusion to Lucca which shows that he must have spent some time there, and it may be noted, in passing, on what slight foundations some of the Dante legends are built up. Among those who are expiating the sin of Gluttony, he sees Buonagiunta, a lawyer of Lucca, who was also a poet, and hearing him whisper the name "Gentucca," he pauses to speak with him. Buonagiunta tells him that in his native city of Lucca there is now living a maiden who will one day make it a pleasant place of residence to him. This lady has been identified with a certain Gentucca Morli: and since she was married to Cosciorino Fondora when Dante visited Lucca, it is asserted by some that his friendship with her was an unworthy one. The assertion is difficult to disprove at this distance of time; but it seems scarcely fair to put such an interpretation upon the kindness of the hospitable mistress of a house to a lonely and penniless wanderer, especially as Francesco da Buti, in the Commentary on Dante's Works which he wrote at the end of the fourteenth century, says that he formed an attachment to

her "on account of her great virtue and modesty, and not with any other love."

Visits to Bologna, Forli and Paris are also mentioned by the early Chroniclers; and in the Monastery of Santa Croce di Fonte Avellana near to Gubbio, the room is still shown in which Dante is said to have been lodged by the Prior Moricone. It is here that he is supposed to have written some of the later Cantos of the *Paradiso*, and it is in the twenty-first Canto that, through the mouth of S. Peter Damiano, he describes the Monastery, standing on Mount Catria:

> 'Twixt either shore
> Of Italy, nor distant from thy land,
> A stony ridge ariseth; in such sort
> The thunder doth not lift his voice so high.
> They call it Catria: at whose foot, a cell
> Is sacred to the lonely Eremite;
> For worship set apart and holy rites.

One sojourn that he made cannot fail to have had much happiness for him, for the presence of Giotto in the city of Padua was a link with his past life in Florence. The date of this visit is fixed by the document relating to the transfer of some money with the signature as witness—*Dantino d'Aligerii de florentia et nunc stat paduæ. Aug.* 27, 1306.

Doubt has been cast upon it by some critics, but it is generally accepted as proving the time of Dante's stay, and a house near the bridge of San Lorenzo is still shown as the place where he was lodged under Giotto's roof.

Giotto was at this time painting his frescoes in the chapel of the Arena, and the friends doubtless held much converse together, for Vasari, in his *Lives of the Painters*, says that Giotto gave Dante ideas for his poems, while Dante gave Giotto ideas for his paintings. It was

in the year 1303 that one of the citizens of Padua, Enrico Scrovigni, began to build the chapel of the Sant' Annunziata on the site of the Roman amphitheatre, or arena. Enrico was the son of that Rinaldo di Scrovigni whom Dante mentions in the 17th Canto of the *Inferno*, as seen among the Usurers, each of whom he identifies by the Usurer's pouch, emblazoned with the bearer's coat of arms:

> And one, who bore a fat and azure swine
> Pictured on his white scrip, addressed me thus:
> What doest thou in this deep? Go now and know
> Since yet thou livest, that my neighbour here,
> Vitaliano on my left shall sit.
> A Paduan with these Florentines am I.

Vitaliano was a well-known Usurer of Padua, still living in 1300, whom Rinaldo predicts will come and join him in the place of punishment for those who have made their wealth unjustly; but Rinaldo's son sought to obtain pardon for him by using some of his nefarious gains for God's glory, as the Robber Barons sought to expiate their crimes by building churches. Some two or three years later, when the chapel was finished, Enrico employed the Florentine Giotto to paint the interior with frescoes; and Benvenuto da Imola, who wrote his Chronicle about fifty years after Dante's death, says that it was in 1306 that the poet came to the city. Giotto was now about thirty years old, some years younger than Dante, and his wife and children had come with him from Florence. Giotto, as is well known, had no graces of person, and his friends did not scruple to tell him so; both Boccaccio and Petrarch speak of his lack of beauty, and Dante apparently went even further, for Benvenuto says that he marvelled at the ugliness of Giotto's children and wondered

how the creations of his brain could be so exquisite when his sons and daughters were so ill-favoured.

The frescoes in the Arena chapel are some of the most beautiful that ever came from the Master's hand, but it is to be regretted that when he painted his own portrait and that of Enrico Scrovigni among the Saints in glory, he did not add one of Dante, so that it could be compared with his Bargello portrait and make a mid-way link between that youthful serenity and the tragic sadness of the painting in the Duomo.

It is among the allegorical Vices and Virtues that adorn the chapel that we seem to find traces of those ideas with which Dante is said to have aided his friend—Envy, grasping a purse in her claws, is stung by the serpent that protrudes from her own mouth; Injustice, a horrible figure, lurks in a crevice of the rock, waiting to catch the unconscious traveller as he passes by, and these are subjects that might have come straight from the *Inferno*. But it is in the fresco of the Last Judgment that it is said that Giotto was principally indebted to the poet, a statement that may well be believed when the details of the fresco are compared with the imagery of the *Divina Commedia*.

But though Dante's mind was already occupied with that unseen world which he was to survey and map out for generations of future readers, he had not lost his interest in mundane affairs, and in the year 1308 the election of a new head to the Holy Roman Empire set his hopes for Italy once more aflame.

Henry the Seventh of Luxemburg was born in the year 1270, and succeeded early to his inheritance, since both his father and his elder brother, Walram, were killed in 1288. The youth of eighteen began his reign well, he founded schools and monasteries and vowed to maintain justice with an impartial hand. He received

knighthood from Philip the Fair, king of France, and was married to Margaret of Brabant, a princess whom he loved devotedly until her death. His younger brother, Baldwin, who had been educated in Paris, was consecrated Archbishop in 1308, and as one of the Electors of the Empire he agreed to try and secure the crown for Henry when the Emperor Albert was assassinated by his nephew, John of Swabia, two months later. The first and most necessary means to this end was the approval of Pope Clement the Fifth, who had been chosen to succeed Boniface in 1305. Clement had no particular love for Henry, but he was determined to thwart King Philip, who was plotting to get the Imperial crown either for himself or his brother Charles, and thus make France paramount in Europe; and with the Papal influence on his side, Henry succeeded in gaining enough votes from the electors to raise him to the proud position of Overlord.

There were others beside Dante who entertained an exalted view of the young Emperor, and among them was Villani, who says "He was wise and just and gracious, valiant, firm in arms and virtuous, and if he had lived longer he would have done the greatest things."

But perhaps no one built such high hopes upon him as the exiled poet, who longed above all things to see Italy united and at peace and believed that this result could only be obtained by the establishment of a universal empire. That he could express such an opinion as this shows how little of a Guelf he was at heart; the Papal rule seemed to him to create more disorders than it cured; and since men's minds at that time were forced to turn into one of the two directions, he turned towards the Imperial idea as the remedy for the evils that distracted the world.

This remedy he sets out at length in his treatise—*De Monarchia*—a work which Boccaccio says was written "at the coming of the Emperor Henry." It is divided into three books, the first designed to prove that a supreme Monarchy is necessary to preserve peace in the world; the second, that the Roman State is the great example of past supremacy, and therefore must be the source of it in the present; the third, that the appointment of the supreme Monarchy must be from God alone, and not through the agency of the Papal authority.

The treatise may seem dry reading now, but it was startling enough to its first readers, for in it Dante ventured to attack the Pope's claim to the Temporal Power, a proceeding the boldness of which can only be realised when the sway of the Church in those days is remembered. The attack was all the more marked because he was a faithful son of the Church, and had no thought of leaving her; he denounced her claims, not as a rebel, but as one of her own household; and since this attitude gave an added sting to his charges, it is not surprising to learn from Boccaccio that the book was condemned by the Pope's Legate after Dante's death, and that if he could have had his way the author's bones would have been burned with it.

The aim of the Papal policy was not, as has sometimes been supposed, to do away altogether with the Empire so that the Pope might hold an undisputed temporal sway in Europe; its intention was rather to exercise that Overlordship to which the Emperor laid claim, and while upholding his rule to make it clear that he only received it from the Pope as his vassal. It was this Papal Overlordship that Dante dared to challenge: Neither the Pope, nor the Emperor, he says, holds supreme power—supreme power belongs to God alone; and as it is the

Pope's duty to lead men to heavenly things, so it is the Emperor's duty to lead them in all matters relating to their temporal welfare. Spiritual things are, indeed, higher than temporal; and therefore in spiritual things the Emperor must be subject to the Pope, but God is the Head over all; and therefore it is He who places the Emperor on his throne, and from whom he holds his power.

This is a bold statement enough, but he adds to it one that is even more daring. The Church bases its claims on the Decretals (the Papal Decrees which formed part of the Canon Law), but Dante declares that it is absolutely false to say that the traditions of the Church are the foundations of the Faith, for before the Church was founded there were the Old and New Testaments, and with the founding of the Church came the Councils at which Christ Himself was present—the Decretals came long afterwards, and have no more authority than the traditions, for their blind adhesion to which, Christ rebuked the Pharisees. That he was fully aware of the boldness of his opinions is proved by a passage in Book III., in which, after stating that the pretensions of the Church with regard to the Imperial power are not in accordance with the will of God, he adds:

> The chief Pontiff, Vicar of our Lord Jesus Christ and the successor of Peter, to whom we owe, not indeed all that we owe to Christ, but all that we owe to Peter, contradicts this truth, urged it may be by zeal for the keys, and also other pastors of the Christian sheepfolds, and others whom I believe to be only led by zeal for our mother the Church. These all, perchance from zeal and not from pride, withstand the truth that I am about to prove. But there are certain others in whom obstinate greed has extinguished the light of reason, who are of their father the Devil, and yet pretend to be sons of the Church. They not only stir up quarrels

in this question, but they hate the name of the most sacred office of Prince, and would shamelessly deny the principles which we have laid down for this and the previous questions. There is also a third class called Decretalists, utterly without knowledge or skill in philosophy or theology, which rely entirely on their Decretals (which doubtless I think should be venerated), and hoping, I believe, that these Decretals will prevail, disparage the power of the Empire.*

It is impossible, however, to read the *De Monarchia* without feeling that there are many who hold the office of Prince sacred, who would not be willing to subscribe to Dante's doctrine of Imperial Overlordship. "It is better," he says, "for the human race to be ruled by one than by many, and therefore there should be a Monarch who is a single Prince, and if it is better it is more acceptable to God, since God always wills what is best."

This is only one among many passages in which Dante pre-supposes the goodness of his cause and mistakes argument for evidence. He cites, for example, Virgil's Fourth Eclogue, in which the Golden Age is depicted as a reign of Justice, and says that as Justice is only possible in a Monarchy, Justice must be strongest in the world "when it is in one who is most willing and most powerful; the Monarch is this, therefore it is only when Justice is in the Monarch that it is greatest in the world," an argument that leads him on to the conclusion that Virgil advocated the sway of an absolute ruler. But an argument such as this could only be convincing if it were incontestably proved that Justice cannot be as successfully embodied in a democracy as in an autocracy.

Nor is this flaw in his reasoning confined to special instances, it underlies his whole thesis, for when he argues that the Roman State was strong and prosperous because

* Translated by F. C. Church.

it was undivided and indivisible, and that all that the world needs is the re-establishment of such a State under the rule of an Emperor, he ignores the fact that the Roman State was no more undivided and indivisible than any other human institution, and that it only prospered while it gave free expression to the wishes and opinions of the people as well as of the government. Not Co-operation, but Control, was his panacea for the troubles of the world—"Oh! race of Mankind!" he exclaims at the close of Book I., "what storms must toss thee, what losses must thou endure, what shipwrecks must buffet thee, as long as thou, a beast of many heads, strivest after contrary things!" a reproach that seems to be echoed in Chaucer's lines in the *Clerke's Tale*:

> Oh! stormy people, unsad and ever untrewe,
> And indiscrete and chaunging as a vane,
> Delyting ever in rombel that is newe
> For lyk the mone ay waxe ye and wane,

for Chaucer had travelled much in Italy, and was familiar with the writings of him whom in the *Monkes Tale* he calls "the grete poet of Itaille that highte Dante."

It was in December, 1310, that Henry came to Italy, with the avowed intention of healing the feuds between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines, and Dante's cherished dream seemed about to be realised. It was at this time that he wrote his letter to the princes and peoples of Italy, in which he exhorts them to seize the golden opportunity:

> Behold now is the acceptable time in which the signs of consolation and peace arise. For a new day grows bright, revealing a dawn that already lessens the gloom of long calamity. Henceforth let thy heart be joyful, O Italy, who deserveth to be pitied even by the Saracens, but who straightway shall be looked upon with envy throughout the world,

because thy bridegroom, the solace of the earth and the glory of the people, the most clement Henry, Divine Augustus and Cæsar hastens to the nuptials. Dry thy tears and blot out the traces of sorrow, O most beauteous, for he is at hand who will free thee from the bonds of the impious; who, smiting the wicked, will destroy them at the edge of the sword and will hire his vineyard to other husbandmen who at the time of harvest will yield the fruit of justice. He will pardon the repentant, but punish the guilty, therefore consider in time that he who resists authority resists the ordinance of God, and he who withstands the Divine ordinance opposes a will co-equal with omnipotence, and it is hard to kick against the pricks.*

But the months passed on, and Henry's coming was delayed, he lingered in the north of Italy, detained by constant fighting and by obstacles of all descriptions, while misfortune already began to dog him in the death of his younger brother and the decimation of his troops by pestilence. If only Florence, or one of the principal cities, would urge him to hasten, it seemed to Dante that the position would be more hopeful; and since the princes and the peoples had paid no attention to his letter, he followed it up with one addressed more particularly to the Florentines, on whom he pours out indignant reproaches for their apathy:

Dante Alighieri, a Florentine, and undeservedly an exile, to those most infamous Florentines within the city.

The compassionate Providence of the eternal King, who, while in His goodness He perpetuates His celestial kingdom, does not in disdain desert our earthly one, decreed that human affairs should be governed by the Holy Empire of the Romans in order that mankind might repose in the calm of so great a protection, and that it might everywhere be ruled according to law and the demands of Nature. Although this truth is confirmed by the divine word, although antiquity, supported by the prop of reason alone confirms this, nevertheless

* Translated by C. S. Latham.

it is in no slight degree commended in that, when the throne of Augustus is vacant, all the world swerves from the right way. For the helmsmen and rowers in the bark of Peter sleep, and Italy, wretched and alone, abandoned to private rule, and destitute of all public government, is struck by a force of wind and wave so great that words cannot describe it, yea, even the unfortunate Italians can scarce measure it with their tears. The Roman Prince is the Monarch of the earth and ambassador of God—ye wicked ones use the right of prescription, repudiate the duty of vassalage and choose to rise up in the madness of rebellion. This standard bearer of the Roman Empire, the divine and triumphant Henry, thirsting not for his private advantage, but for the public good of the world, undertook each arduous emprize for us, partaking our hardships of his own free will, so that to him, after Christ, the prophet Isaiah pointed the finger of prediction when by the Holy Ghost he foretold—"surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." Therefore, if ye do not wish to dissemble, ye will see that the time is now at hand most bitterly to repent of your foolhardy presumption.

Written on the 31st of March, on the confines of Tuscany, near the springs of the Arno, in the first year of the most auspicious passage of the Emperor Henry into Italy.*

But this letter produced no more effect than the former one, and in despair, Dante addressed himself to Henry in terms that strike a strangely jarring note. The prevalent conception of the poet is of one whose soul was as a star and dwelt apart, sublime and majestic, and that he should regard the Emperor as a being almost divine seems derogatory to himself.

"Written in Tuscany, near the springs of the Arno, on April 16, 1311, the first year of the descent into Italy of the most noble and fortunate Henry," is the superscription of the letter, and it breathes impassioned entreaty in every line:

"The feet of the most holy Conqueror and excellent

* Translated by C. S. Latham.

Master, Lord Henry, by Divine Providence king of the Romans, always august, are kissed by his most devoted servant, Dante Alighieri, a Florentine, and undeservedly in exile, and all Tuscans everywhere who desire the public peace."

This is its commencement, and it goes on to beg him "not to tarry longer, for men are beginning to cry: 'Art thou he who should come, or do we look for another?' When I saw you, silently I said to myself, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' Wherefore come quickly, for you have been made king that you may smite Amalek and not spare Agag. You waste the spring as well as the winter in Milan, do you not see that Florence is the stinking fox, the darting viper, the sick sheep that infects the flock? Up then, thou noble son of Jesse, smite Goliath and make the Philistines to flee and set Israel at liberty. And as now, while exiles in Babylon, we lament in remembering holy Jerusalem; so then, as citizens, and breathing in peace, with gladness shall we call to mind the miseries of turmoil."

The occasion on which Dante saw the Emperor, referred to by him here, is supposed to have been his coronation in Milan, where, on the sixth of January, 1311, he received the Iron Crown of Lombardy; for in another passage of the letter he speaks of having paid homage "when my hands touched thy feet and my lips made their tribute." But urgent as was the appeal, Henry seemed to be deaf to it, the summer passed, the autumn came, and while at Genoa in October his beloved wife fell sick and died; the messengers whom he sent to Florence were treated with scorn; his coronation in Rome was opposed by the Pope; and since the Vatican was forbidden to him, the ceremony had to be performed in the church of St. John Lateran

Returning to Tuscany, Henry besieged Florence, but pestilence again attacked his army, and he retreated to Pisa. In August, 1313, while at Buonconvento, near Siena, he was taken ill, whether with fever or from the effects of poison will never be known, and dying there, his remains were first taken to the church of Suvereto in the Maremma, and were thence brought to Pisa for burial, escorted by a procession of mourners that numbered some thousands. His body was first interred in the Duomo, but was afterwards removed to the Campo Santo, where his tomb may still be seen with that figure of the Emperor upon it of which the French Dante scholar, J. J. Ampère, said: *Il a l'air de dormir mal.*

He may indeed seem to sleep unrestfully, that storm-tossed and disappointed Emperor, but the statement of some of Dante's biographers, that his death may be laid at the poet's door, is surely an exaggerated one. "Through him that life, the noblest he had ever known, had been brought to an untimely end," says Dean Plumptre, "and with it had vanished all hopes of the theocratic empire. Of all forms of discipline for such a nature as Dante's, that was the hardest to bear. He may have found some gleam of comfort in the thought that there was a throne and a crown in Paradise for the hero whom he had tempted to an enterprise for which Italy was not yet ripe."

The allusion is to the thirtieth Canto of the *Paradiso*, where Beatrice, showing Dante the seats of the Blessèd, points to one with a crown suspended over it that is still empty, and says that there shall rest the soul

> Of the great Henry, he who by the world
> Augustus hailed, to Italy must come
> Before her day be ripe. But ye are sick
> And in your tetchy wantonness as blind

As is the infant that of hunger dies
And drives away the nurse.

That Italy did refuse the aid of Henry in settling her internal strifes, we know, and that his death meant the downfall of Dante's hopes is equally certain, but that the mighty lord and potentate was tempted to his doom by the persuasions of a poor and wandering exile is scarcely credible. The man of thought has outlived the man of action, and for one who remembers Henry of Luxemburg to-day, there are hundreds to whom the name of Dante is a household word; but the relative importance of the two men now must not betray us into imagining that the scales dipped in the same way while they were alive. Henry was then at the pinnacle of earthly glory, Dante ate of the crumbs that fell from the tables of the rich, and Simone Dall' Antella was probably right when in his sonnet on the death of the Emperor he attributed his misfortunes, not to Dante's influence, but to his own ambitious desires:

Alas! Ambition, thou his enemy,
Who lurest the poor wanderer on his way
But never bringst him where his rest may be—
O leave him now, for he is gone astray
Himself out of his very self through thee,
Till now the broken stems his feet betray
And caught with boughs before and boughs behind,
Deep in thy tangled wood he sinks entwined.*

But though the Emperor was in all probability oblivious of the poet, it is to the poet that he owes his immortality; in the pages of history he is but one of a fleeting crowd of monarchs, statesmen and warriors, but to Dante he was the Desire of all Nations, the Day-Star who should bring light and healing to the distracted world; and as

* Translated by D. G. Rossetti.

long as the *Divina Commedia* is read, the lustre of Henry's name will continue to shine.

So intensely, indeed, had Dante believed in Henry's divine mission, that though in due course another Emperor was elected to fill the vacant throne, he had no further hope of an imperial solution of Italian problems. It was to the Pope that he next turned his eyes; for on the death of Clement the Fifth in 1314, he thought he saw a chance of bringing back the Ark of the Church from Avignon to Rome. Immediately after Clement's election, ten new Cardinals had been created, all of whom were French or Gascon; and when he died, out of the twenty-four assembled to elect his successor, only six were Italian. But Dante still hoped for an Italian Pope and for his return to Rome, and he addressed a letter to the Italian Cardinals, urging them to use all their influence to bring about the desired result, reminding them of the desolation of Rome, bereft of her rightful lord:

> How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people? How does she become as a widow that was mistress of the nations? It is for you, being one at heart, to fight manfully for the Bride of Christ, for the seat of the Bridegroom, which is Rome, for our Italy, and in a word, for the whole commonwealth of pilgrims upon earth.

He deprecates their resentment at his interference, telling them that if it should seem to them as the sin of Uzzah recorded in the Scriptures, they must remember that Uzzah interfered with the Ark, while he was interfering only with the refractory oxen who were dragging it out of its path, a comparison that was little likely to appease their wrath. The letter produced no more result than any of his other appeals; two years passed away, and when an election was at last made, it was a Cardinal from Portugal who became Pope, with the title of John

the Twenty-second; and it was not till long after Dante's death that the seat of the Papal government was brought back from Avignon to Rome.

It was in the year 1315 that Uguccione della Faggiuola, the Ghibelline leader, made a desperate attack on the Florentine Guelfs. The battle was fought at Montecatini in the month of August, and Uguccione was victorious; but no lasting advantage was gained, for his troops were not strong enough to force an entrance into the city. In the following October the Florentine Government issued a list of traitors, among whom were Dante and his sons, summoning them to Florence, and condemning them to be seized and executed if they did not obey. Uguccione fled to Verona and sought refuge with Can Grande della Scala; and though the date of Dante's second visit is not known, he may very likely have accompanied the leader in his flight. In the next year an amnesty was proclaimed, by which certain of the exiles were to be allowed to return on payment of a fine, with the condition attached, that they were to present themselves at the door of the Baptistery on St. John's day, carrying tapers and wearing mock mitres on their heads.

Dante was not included in this amnesty, as those exiled in the years 1301 and 1302 were expressly excepted, but some of his friends wrote to ask him if he would be willing to accept pardon on these conditions if they could prevail upon the authorities to include him in the list. To this proposal he replied with lofty indignation, addressing his letter to a priest in Florence, and asking him to communicate its contents to the other friends who had joined in the suggestion. After speaking of the absurdity of supposing that he would submit to such indignities, he says:

> Is this, then, the glorious recall wherewith Dante Alighieri is summoned back to his country after an exile patiently endured

for almost fifteen years? Is this the reward of innocence manifest to all the world, of unceasing toil and sweat in study? Far be it from the friend of philosophy, so senseless a degradation, befitting only a soul of clay, as to submit himself to be paraded like a prisoner as some infamous wretches have done. No! this is not the way for me to return to my country. If another can be found which does not derogate from the fame and honour of Dante, that will I take with no laggard steps. But if no such way be found to enter Florence, then will I never re-enter it. What! can I not everywhere gaze upon the sun and the stars? can I not under any sky meditate upon the most precious truths, without first rendering myself inglorious, nay, ignominious, in the eyes of the people and city of Florence. Nor indeed will bread be lacking.

His refusal was a noble one; but how bitterly he felt his continued exile is shown by a passage in the first part of the *Convivio*, in which he speaks of the defects in his work as being in some measure due to his circumstances:

Alas! would that it might have pleased the Dispenser of the Universe that the cause of my excuse might never have been; that others might neither have sinned against me, nor I have suffered punishment unjustly; the punishment, I say, of exile and poverty! Since it was the pleasure of the citizens of the most beautiful and the most famous daughter of Rome, Florence, to cast me out of her most sweet bosom (wherein I was born and nourished even to the height of my life, and in which, with her goodwill, I desire with all my heart to repose my weary soul and to end the time which is given to me) I have gone through almost all the land in which this language lives—a pilgrim, almost a mendicant, showing forth against my will the wound of Fortune, with which the ruined man is often unjustly reproached. Truly I have been a ship without a sail and without a rudder, borne to divers ports and lands and shores by the dry wind which blows from doleful poverty; and I have appeared vile in the eyes of many, who perhaps through some report may have imaged me in other form. In the sight of whom not only my person became vile, but each work already completed was held to be of less value than that might again be which remained yet to be done.

[*Photograph A. T.*

Twelfth Century Cloisters in the Church of S. Zeno Maggiore, Verona.

The *Convito*, or *Convivio*, for it is called by both names, the two words having the same meaning of *Banquet*, is described by Dante as a Feast of Reason, prepared for those who are unlearned in Philosophy. There is a beautiful humility about this description—very different from the attitude of the generality of profound thinkers towards the multitude; the desire for knowledge, he says, is universal, but many are hindered in its pursuit, he himself has been prevented from reaching full satisfaction, but he has sat at the feet of others, and he wishes to hand on the fragments of the feast to those who are even less fortunate than himself:

As every man is naturally the friend of every man, and every friend grieves over the defects of him whom he loves, so those who are fed at the high table of knowledge are not without pity for those who eat grass with the lower animals. And since pity is the mother of bounty, those who know always give liberally of their riches to the real poor and are thus living fountains to satisfy the natural thirst above described. I, therefore, who do not sit at that blessed table, yet, fled from the pasture of the vulgar, place myself at the feet of those who sit there, and gather up what falls from them—I, knowing the miserable life of those whom I have left behind me, and moved by the sweetness of that which, little by little, I gather up, have pitifully reserved something, a little portion of which has already been communicated to them, and which I have made them greatly desire.

This object—that of aiding the unlearned—necessitated his writing the *Convivio*, not in Latin, but in colloquial Italian, and he denounces the obstinacy of those writers who refuse to abandon Latin in no measured terms:

To the perpetual infamy and dispraise of the wicked men of Italy who commend the language of other nations while they despise their own, I say that their conduct is due to abominable causes. The first is blindness of judgment, the second is a false excuse, the third is a desire for vainglory, the fourth is an invention of envy, and the fifth is vileness of soul.

But of this matter he promises to treat more fully in another work, and he goes on to explain the scope of his *Banquet*. The plan of the book resembles the *Vita Nuova*, that is to say, he takes certain poems that he has written and gives an explanation of them; but the later work has not the freshness and charm of the earlier, and it never attained to the same popularity. The incident of the Lady of the Window, which occurs at the end of the *Vita Nuova*, had caused him, he says, to be misunderstood by his friends, even Guido Cavalcanti had reproached him for his fickleness in love; he wishes, therefore, to show how baseless were their charges—the Lady of the Window did, indeed, comfort his grief, but she was only an allegory, or picture, of that Divine Philosophy which draws the soul from the pains and sorrows of this life to the contemplation of celestial wisdom, and he goes on to unfold the meaning of the poems written in her praise.

Of these poems there seem to have been fourteen, all of which he promises to expound, but only three are actually dealt with, and the book breaks off suddenly after touching on many dishes in the Banquet of Reason—physics and metaphysics, astronomy and astrology, religion and politics, and other subjects with which philosophy has consoled him for the loss of Beatrice. But this consolation, he assures us, has not had the effect of making him forget his beloved Lady, on the contrary, it has impressed her virtues more strongly upon him, and in a beautiful passage on the immortality of the soul, he affirms his faith in his future reunion with her:

> We are made certain of this immortality by the most true doctrine of Christ, which is the way, the truth and the light; the way, because by it we go without impediment to the happiness of that immortality; the truth, because it permits no error; the light, because it illuminates us in the darkness

of our earthly ignorance. This doctrine, I say, makes us sure above all other reasonings, since He has given it who sees and measures our immortality, which we cannot perfectly see while our mortal is mixed with our immortal; but we see it perfectly by faith, and by reason we see it darkly in consequence of the mixture of our mortality. And this should be the most potent argument of all, that in us these two exist; and I thus believe and affirm and am certain, that I shall pass after this life to a better—where lives that glorious Lady whom my soul loved.

In the treatise which he calls *De Vulgari Eloquentia* (the Power of the Vulgar Tongue) he goes more fully into the question of the use of the vernacular. It may seem strange to some in the present day that this matter can ever have been in doubt, since no modern publisher would dream of bringing out a work in Latin except as a class book for schools or a luxury for the libraries of wealthy book-lovers. But in Dante's day, Latin was no dead letter, it was the *lingua franca* of thinking men, employed both for the lectures of the professor and the disputations of the scholar. And the reason for this was a sound one, for by this means the universities of Europe were open to students of any and every nation, and opinions and ideas could be freely exchanged in a way that is impossible to-day. To write a book in Latin was not to restrict its public, but to enlarge it, since it would be confined by no national boundaries, but would be available for readers everywhere. That Dante should have felt so strongly that the vernacular was the proper medium for the writer, notwithstanding the fact that he was thereby cutting himself off from his compeers in foreign lands, is one of the most striking proofs of his patriotism. That the possession of a national literature would be one of the strongest bonds of union to a country split up into rival provinces, was a truth that he recognised

at a time when few had so much as dimly perceived it, and since he not only recognised it, but acted upon it when he came to write his great poem, the *Divina Commedia* has done more to make a United Italy than even Dante could foresee.

This treatise was intended for scholars, and makes no popular appeal; it discusses such questions as the origin of language, the use of rhyme and rhythm, and the forms of various kinds of poetry, the ballad, the sonnet, and the *Canzone,* and traces the construction of the poems that had been introduced into Italy from the Troubadours of Provence, discussing at length the poetry of many of the romance writers with a fulness that shows how intimate a study he had made of it.

Like the *Convivio,* the treatise breaks off, and is left unfinished; and since we have no details as to when and where these two books were written, we can only suppose that some fresh trouble or danger interrupted them, and that when he once again reached a place of safety he did not care to go back to them. That he had already begun to write the *Divina Commedia* we know, but all his writings must have been subject to continual disturbance as he journeyed about from place to place; and when he returned to Verona he no doubt hoped that he had at last found a resting-place in which he might finally turn his back upon the turmoil of political strife, and give himself whole-heartedly to the task of glorifying his Lady.

That the idea of the *Divina Commedia* had now fully taken possession of him, there can be no doubt. Boccaccio tells the story of the discovery of the first seven Cantos of the *Inferno* among some possessions of the poet's that had been saved when the houses of the exiles were plundered by the mob on the publication of the decree of banishment:

When he was most intent on his glorious work, and had already composed seven cantos of the first part thereof, the which he entitles Hell, conducting his invention wondrously and poetising not a whit as a Pagan, but in most Christian fashion (a thing ne'er done before under sanction of this name), there came upon him the most grievous chance of his banishment, or flight, whichever we should call it, whereon he must abandon both this and all things else and go wandering about for many years, uncertain of his lot, amongst divers friends and Seigneurs. But even as we must believe very certainly that what God ordains Fortune cannot by aught that she may oppose against it restrain from its due end, even if she may perhaps interpose some delay, it came to pass that a certain one was searching amongst Dante's things for a special writing (of which perchance he had need) in certain chests that had been hastily rescued and deposited in sacred places, what time the ungrateful and disordered mob had riotously rushed upon his house, seeking plunder rather than just revenge, and there he found the first seven cantos that had been composed by Dante, the which he read with admiration, and not knowing what they were, and taking extreme delight in them he withdrew them by guile from the place where they were and took them and showed them to a citizen of ours whose name was Dino di Messer Lambertuccio, who had great fame in those days, in Florence, as a poet in rhyme.*

Dino, he goes on to say, was so delighted with it, that, learning that Dante was staying with the Marchese Malaspina, in the Lunigiana, a man of great talent himself, and one who held Dante in high estimation, he sent the seven Cantos to him, and begged him to urge Dante to go on with the poem. This the Marchese did, and Boccaccio says that Dante made reply: "I verily supposed that these, along with many other of my writings and effects, were lost when my house was plundered, and therefore I had given up all thoughts of them. But since it has pleased God that they should not be lost, and He has thus restored

* Translated by P. H. Wicksteed.

them to me, I shall endeavour, as far as I am able, to proceed with them, according to my first design." And recalling his old thoughts and resuming his interrupted work, he speaks thus in the beginning of the eighth Canto:

My wondrous history I here renew.

Boccaccio adds that these Cantos were begun in Latin, but that Dante re-wrote them in Italian.

Another story relating to the *Inferno* is told by several of the early Chroniclers; after it was finished, Dante is said to have journeyed to Paris, and stopped on the way to seek hospitality at the Convent of Santa Croce del Corvo, not far from Spezia, where a certain Ilario, a friend of the Ghibelline leader Uguccione, was Prior. Admitted into the guest-house, the Prior came to speak to him and put the question usually asked of wayfarers: "What do you come here to seek?" To this Dante made no answer, and in surprise the Prior put the question a second time, when Dante replied with the single word "Peace." The Prior is said to have recognised that the stranger was someone very different from those who usually came to his door, and after they had held much converse together, Dante gave him the manuscript of the *Inferno*, and asked him to send it to the man who was the friend of both—Uguccione della Faggiuola; this Ilario did, and the Latin letter with which he accompanied it is quoted by some of the biographers of the poet.

During this later visit to Paris, Dante again attended lectures at the University, and it is interesting to notice that among the ceremonies in connection with the sixth Centenary of his death a service was arranged in the church of S. Severin, chosen for the purpose because it is close to the site of the old church of St. Julien-le-Pauvre,

where the poet is said to have worshipped during his stay in the city.

With his mind thus steeped in thoughts of the unseen world, Dante came to the gay and splendid Court of the young Can Grande, lately arrived at man's estate, and now sole ruler of the dominions of the Scaligeri. It was natural that Uguccione should have sought his protection after the defeat of his army, for Can Grande was the head of the Ghibelline League; but though war and strife must have been frequent topics of discussion in the palace, the young lord had many other interests in his life, and one of his Chroniclers records that he gathered men of all nationalities around him—"You might hear Germans, Latins, Frenchmen, Flemings, Englishmen, speaking together; there you might hear disputes on astrology, philology, and theology."

Other Chroniclers describe the magnificence of the Court, the good looks and the talents of its lord, and the generosity with which he entertained the guests whom he received and the fugitives whom he sheltered. The rooms in which they were lodged are said to have been decorated with pictures and designs suited to their several conditions—a distinguished theologian would be put into a room with a frescoed Paradise upon its walls, and a great soldier would be paid the graceful compliment of a painted or sculptured Victory on which to gaze. A poet, such as Dante, would have a pensive Muse for his delectation, or—since he was an exile as well as a poet, he might find the chamber allotted to him adorned with the figure of Hope. Such a man as this—so noble, so full of appreciation of all that was beautiful, was surely a fitting patron of one of the greatest geniuses whom the world has ever seen, and that Dante sought his hospitality not only willingly, but even eagerly, we know

from his Dedication to the *Paradiso*, written in the year 1317:

To the magnificent and victorious lord, the Lord Can Grande della Scala, Vicar General of the Most Holy Roman Empire, in the city of Verona and the town of Vicenza, his most devoted Dante Alighieri, a Florentine by birth, but not by character, desires a life happy throughout the duration of many years, and perpetual augmentation of his glorious name. The illustrious praise of your magnificence which vigilant fame scatters abroad as she flies, draws men in divers ways, so as to exalt some in the hope of prosperous success, and to cast down others in the terror of destruction. Now this renown, passing all the deeds of moderate men, I was once wont to think extravagant, as going beyond the warrant of truth, but lest continual doubt should keep me too much in suspense, even as the Queen of Sheba sought Jerusalem, or as Pallas sought Helicon, so did I seek Verona to scrutinise by the faithful testimony of my own eyes the things which I had heard. And there I beheld your splendours, I beheld and at the same time touched your bounty; and whereas I had formerly expected excess in what was said, so afterwards I knew that the facts themselves were greater. Wherefore it came to pass that as a mere report had already made me your well-wisher, with a certain submission of soul, from the first sight of the source itself I became your most devoted servant and friend. Cherishing your friendship then as my dearest treasure, I desire to preserve it with loving forethought and continued care.

He then gives a description of the poem, and concludes by saying: "This poem I inscribe, I offer and exclusively commend to you."

It was only the first few Cantos of the *Paradiso* that were sent with this Dedication, and before they were written Dante had already left Verona; but that the *Inferno* was known and talked about when he arrived at Can Grande's Court, we learn from an anecdote narrated by Boccaccio: "The poet," he says, "was of moderate height, and after reaching maturity was accustomed to

[*Photograph A. T.*

Twelfth Century Doorway of the Church of S. Zeno Maggiore, Verona.

walk somewhat bowed, with a slow and gentle pace, clad always in such sober dress as befitted his ripe years. His face was long, his nose aquiline, and his eyes rather large than small. His jaws were large and the lower lip protruded beyond the upper. His complexion was dark, his hair and beard thick, black and curled, and his expression ever melancholy and thoughtful. And thus it chanced one day in Verona, when the fame of his works had spread everywhere, particularly that part of his *Commedia* entitled the *Inferno*, and when he was known by sight to many, both men and women, that as he was passing before a doorway where sat a group of women, one of them softly said to the others—but not so softly but that she was distinctly heard by Dante and such as accompanied him—'Do you see the man who goes down into Hell and returns when he wills and brings back tidings of them that are below?' To which one of the others naïvely answered, 'You say truly, indeed! Do you not see how his beard is crisped and his face darkened by the heat and smoke down there?' Hearing those words spoken behind him, and knowing that they came from an innocent belief of the women, he was pleased, and smiling a little as if he was content that they should hold such an opinion, he passed on."

It is not surprising that Dante found pleasure in this tribute to the powers of his imagination, ignorant though it might be—the work which had been begun years before had now been pondered over and dwelt upon, recast, expanded and continually laboured at by day and night, until it had become an integral part of his being. He realised now that this was the thing that he had been sent into the world to do, that his Vision was indeed and in truth himself, the very soul of his existence. And if the childlike wonder of the women, illiterate as they were,

could please him, what delight must he not have found in the admiration of the brilliant young lord of the city—a delight which blinded him to possible dangers in the future. Parents have many a time been deceived by flattering praises of their offspring—is it strange that Dante should have been deceived by an appreciation of the child of his brain that was in all probability perfectly genuine at the time that it was uttered?

Like other princes of his age, who looked upon the possession of a poet, an artist or a sculptor, as an added lustre to their Courts, Can Grande had an intense admiration for genius; and though he may not have realised that he was harbouring an Immortal, he was yet appreciative enough to charm the writer whose words had seemed to so many but as idle tales. Boccaccio records that when Dante had finished seven or eight Cantos of his poem he would show them to Can Grande before anyone else had seen them, a convincing proof that he felt secure of sympathy and comprehension in this most sensitive point of his whole nature.

From these mingled sources, then, of gratitude and congeniality, sprang the feeling which made the first part of Dante's sojourn in the palace pass so lightly, but it was not to be supposed that a man of his genius could show the subservience and adaptability necessary for a courtier in those days, and Petrarch brings this out clearly in his account of the relations between the Prince and the poet:

> Dante Alighieri was in his habits and speech, by perversity, more independent than was agreeable to delicate and nice ears, and to the eyes of the princes of our age. He, being an exile from his country, and dwelling with Can Grande, then the universal refuge and consolation of the afflicted, was at first held by him in great honour; but little by little fell back, and from day to day became less agreeable to the Prince.

It is this hint that Rossetti works out at length in his poem, *Dante at Verona*:

At Can la Scala's Court, no doubt
Guests seldom wept, it was brave sport
No doubt, at Can la Scala's Court,
Within the palace and without;
Where music set to madrigals
Loitered all day through groves and halls.

Through leaves and trellis-work the sun
Left the wine cool within the glass—
They feasting where no sun could pass:
And when the women, all as one,
Rose up with brightened cheeks to go
It was a comely thing, we know.

But Dante recked not of the wine,
Whether the women stayed or went,
His visage held one stern intent:
And when the music had its sign
To breathe upon them for more ease,
Sometimes he turned and bade it cease.

And as he spared not to rebuke
The mirth, so oft in Council he
To bitter truth bore testimony;
And when the crafty balance shook
Well poised to make the wrong prevail,
Then Dante's hand would turn the scale.

And if some envoy from afar
Sailed to Verona's sovereign port
For aid or peace, and all the Court
Fawned on its lord, "the Mars of War,"
"Sole arbiter of life and death"—
Be sure that Dante saved his breath.

And Can la Scala marked askance
These things, accepting them for shame,
And scorn, till Dante's guest-ship came
To be a peevish sufferance:
His host sought ways to make his days
Hateful—and such have many ways.

That Can Grande deliberately sought out ways to make Dante feel his guest-ship a burden, is a heavy charge to bring, but there are some things in his life and character that make it seem possible. The Prince was young and light-hearted, he was surrounded by flatterers and flushed with victories in love and war; he was impulsive and impetuous, and he was overbearing in the face of opposition. Ruskin, in his *Verona and its Rivers*, gives a picturesque account of his wooing, or rather, of his capture of his bride, which proves that he could be both headlong and headstrong on occasion:

> He won his wife, Joanna, by a coup de main; he fell in love with her when she was a girl in Rome; then, she was going to be sent to Scotland to be married, but she had to go through Verona, to the Adige gate. So Can Grande pounced upon her, declared she was much too precious a gem—*preziosa gemma*—to be sent to Scotland—and—she went no further.

But these conditions of life and traits of character, though they might well make him guilty of want of consideration for the feelings of others, can hardly explain the wanton discourtesy which the old Chroniclers record, and it is not to be wondered at that Dante did not always take it in good part. "Cane being in a disagreeable mood, which Dante endured badly," is Boccaccio's prelude to one of these stories, and the young lord's overbearing ways were doubtless difficult to endure with a good grace. But Petrarch, who tells the same story, does not mention any impatience on the poet's part: "Among the guests," he says, "were, according to the custom of those days, clowns and buffoons of every description, one of whom, an impudent rascal, by means of his coarse remarks and broad jests, made himself a favourite with everyone, and raised himself to considerable importance. Can Grande, having a suspicion that Dante was vexed by this,

sent for the mountebank, and, after lauding him to the skies, turned to Dante, saying: 'How is it, I wonder, that this buffoon, fool though he be, knows how to please all of us and is made much of by everyone; while you, who are said to have so much wisdom, seem quite unable to do so?' To which Dante made answer: 'This would not excite your wonder if you were to remember that those are friends who have equality of mind and resemble one another in their habits.'"

It may have been this same incident, or perhaps another of similar kind, that comes to us on the authority of Michele Savonarola, grandfather of the great Girolamo: "I will tell you the answer made by Dante to a fool at the Court of the Lord della Scala of Verona, who having received from his master a fine coat as a reward for some piece of buffoonery, showed it to Dante and said: 'You with all your letters and sonnets and books, have never received a present like this.' To which Dante answered: 'What you say is true; and this has fallen to you and not to me, because you have found your likes and I have not yet found mine.'"

A fool may be answered according to his folly, but to flash back retorts to a princely patron is a more dangerous indulgence. An unrefined jest is recorded, which Dante met with a stinging reply. It was the custom in old days to place a page under the table in the banquetting hall to gather up the bones let fall by the guests, and on one such occasion, Can Grande gave the boy a hint to pile them round Dante's chair. When the company rose from the table, the heap of bones was discovered, and the Prince, putting on an air of exaggerated wonder, exclaimed laughingly: "Verily, our Dante is a great eater of meat!" On which the poet, turning a glance of indignant scorn upon his host, replied with a fierce play

upon Can Grande's name, "Sire, you would not see so many bones if I were a dog!" (Messere, voi non vedreste tant' ossa se *cane* io fossi!)

But foolish jests, however hurtful to Dante's feelings, might have been passed over and forgiven if he had been free to concentrate his mind on that great work which was now nearing completion—the work which was to him at once a divine mission and an abiding consolation. But Can Grande, who had at first professed the deepest interest in the progress of the poem, came to think that his guest might be more usefully employed than in devoting himself to such far-away subjects as Heaven and Hell, and that he ought to render some service in return for the hospitality that he was receiving. A small office in the State was therefore found for him, and he was bidden to leave his meditations that he might levy fines and settle the petty disputes of the townspeople—a useful work, no doubt, and one most necessary to be performed, but no more suited to Dante than the taxing of casks of beer to Robert Burns.

Boccaccio tells us how many were the interruptions that the poet suffered while writing his poem—"When he had thus recommenced the great work, he did not finish it, as many think, without frequent interruptions. Indeed, many times, according as the seriousness of supervening events demanded, he put it aside, sometimes for months, again for years, unable to accomplish anything on it." But such interruptions, trying as they must have been, were necessary parts of the life of a homeless exile, entangled in constant political plots and enterprises, and as such, Dante was no doubt resigned to them. In Verona, however, the case was different, he had abandoned his attempts at furthering the cause of the exiles, and having settled down in response to Can Grande's invitation,

[*Photograph A. T.*

COURTYARD OF THE ANCIENT PALACE OF JUSTICE, VERONA.

had hoped to give himself to the work that he knew would be of lasting value to the world. The Prince had encouraged him in this hope, and it must have been a cruel disappointment to him when he was called upon to leave his studies. As Rossetti puts it:

> They named him Justicer-at-Law:
> Each month to bear the tale in mind
> Of hues a wench might wear unfined,
> And of the load an ox might draw;
> To cavil in the weight of bread
> And to see purse-thieves gibbeted.
>
> And when his spirit wove the spell
> (From under-even to over-noon
> In converse with itself alone)
> As high as Heaven, as low as Hell—
> He would be summoned and must go:
> For had not Gian stabbed Giacomo?
>
> Therefore the bread he had to eat
> Seemed brackish, less like corn than tares;
> And the rush-strown accustomed stairs
> Each day seemed steeper to his feet;
> And when the night-vigil was done
> His brows would ache to feel the sun.

Can Grande, in fact, had become weary of the height of spiritual grandeur to which his guest had attained; he had expected a servile deference in return for his patronage, but his beneficiary was greater than himself; and since nothing is more galling than such a superiority, he sought to redress the balance by inflicting humiliation on the loftier nature. To expostulate would have been undignified, and Dante endured until he could endure no more; friendship might have held him for ever in its golden chain, but when his host made it clear to him that his presence had become a burden it was time for him to

leave his refuge and strike out once more into the open sea. Verona, with all her loveliness, was now but a prison to him, he longed to escape from her wooded slopes and terraced streets, from her river winding its way through olives and vineyards, and above all from that palace where gay ladies and mocking cavaliers made merry over the taciturn poet with his face darkened by the fires through which he had passed.

> So the day came after a space,
> When Dante felt assured that there
> The sunlight must be sicklier
> Even than in any other place
> Save only Florence. When that day
> Had come, he rose and went his way.

The last thirteen Cantos of the *Paradiso* were written after Dante's departure, and those thirteen were not shown to Can Grande; but though he would never again submit his work to that once sympathetic critic, he did not, as so many in his place would have done, hold up his ungracious patron to the scorn of the world. The Dedication to the *Paradiso* stands, with its testimony to the joyful anticipation with which he had set out for Verona, and in the very same Canto in which those lines occur which have in them all the bitterness of soul of those who are forced to live on a grudging charity:

> Yea, thou shalt learn how salt his food who fares
> Upon another's bread; how steep his path
> Who treadeth up and down another's stairs,

he goes on to speak of Can Grande in terms of admiration, and even of affection, although in the words that he uses for stairs—*scale*—he once more makes a poignant allusion to the name of his host.

How can we reconcile this seeming contradiction? Surely we find the answer in the nobility of Dante's

nature, for it is not by petty spite that the great souls of the earth vindicate their cause. Dante had eaten of Can Grande's bread, and bitter as that bread had been, he would not revile the bounty that had bestowed it; steep as were the stairs on which his feet had climbed, he would not bring dishonour on the roof which had sheltered him. Many things were written of the Prince in Dante's heart that he would never tell to the world, but such praise as he could utter he would not keep back. Whether Can Grande's eye ever fell upon that sad and dignified praise we do not know; but even though he made the poet no amends, Dante's wrongs have been amply avenged—for Time's revenges are the most far-reaching of all, and he has found an imperishable home in the minds of his fellow-men, while Can Grande lives only by his passing connection with the poet. Every traveller who goes to Verona visits the tombs of the Scaligers—those wonderful, sculptured monuments surrounded by the graceful railing of ironwork on which appears so often the crest of the eagle and the ladder. Can Grande's tomb is to be seen over the door of the little church of Santa Maria Antica; mounted on his horse of stone, his carved lips breathe defiance, as though once again he would shout his battle-cry of *Viva Cane* to a field of flying foes. Yet who, of all the many hundreds who have looked upon his tomb, know anything of him except that he was a member of the princely family in whose last resting-place his bones repose?

Eat and wash hands, Can Grande, scarce
We know their deeds now; hands which fed
Our Dante with that bitter bread.
And thou the watchdog of those stairs
Which of all paths his feet knew well
Were steeper found than Heaven or Hell.

It is said to have been in the year 1317 that Dante went to Ravenna; and though there is no record this time of any eager anticipations, he did in this last refuge find the peaceful shelter that he had so long sought. The contrast between Can Grande della Scala and Count Guido Novello da Polenta was great indeed: Can Grande, though a lover of the Arts, worshipped Mars and Venus rather than the Muses; but Guido Novello was a poet and scholar—his MS. copy of the *Iliad* is still to be seen in the Ambrosian Library at Milan—one, at least, of his poems has been traced in a collection published in Naples in the year 1661, and others have been collected by Professor Ricci. Among these is a sonnet which proves—if any further proof than his own gracious hospitality to Dante were needed—that he bore the poet no ill-will for his allusion to the tragic story of his aunt, Francesca da Rimini, for in it he incorporates one of the lines from the speech put into her mouth in the *Inferno*. The Sonnet is the one beginning

Era l'aer sereno e bel tempo,

and may be thus translated:

When all the days are sweet and calm the air,
When all the birds in joyful chorus sing,
Then to the earth once more returns the Spring.
So when I saw thee first, my joy, my love,
Yea, verily—my joy, my treasure rare—
In thy fair face a glowing beauty shone
And from my heart nought shall that vision move.
Though far from thee, desolate and alone,
My thoughts dwell fondly on thy radiant smile,
That look of love that warmed my inmost heart,
The look that yet remains, beloved one,
And still doth all my fear and care beguile.
Henceforth shall nothing sever thee and me
And Joy triumphant over Grief shall be.

The thirteenth line of this Sonnet is the 135th line of the fifth Canto of the *Inferno—che mai da me non fia diviso.*

A Prince who could write thus was likely to prove a far more sympathetic and appreciative patron than the dashing young ruler who set the seer of the unseen world to collect tolls and dues.

But there was a further contrast between the two. Can Grande's life had been one of unbroken prosperity; as head of the Ghibelline League he had an exceptionally strong position, and since Alberto della Scala had not only reigned peacefully himself, but had been followed in peaceful succession by his three sons, no recent civil conflicts had disturbed the State. Guido Novello, on the other hand, had experienced the ups and downs of fortune: the Polenta family had had to fight for their throne, and the Government was again overthrown in 1295 in the attack organised by the Archbishop of Monreale. That the Polenta rule was soon re-established seems to be indicated by the passage in the *Inferno* (Canto XXVII.), in which Dante says that he met Guido da Montefeltro, ruler of a State in the Romagna, who asked him for news of the upper world, and especially if there was peace or war in his former province at the present time, i.e. 1300, to which Dante replied:

> Oh! spirit who art hidden here below,
> Never was thy Romagna without war
> In her proud tyrants' bosoms, nor is now;
> But open war there left I none. The state
> Ravenna hath maintained this many a year
> Is steadfast. There Polenta's eagle broods,
> And in his broad circumference of plume
> O'er-shadows Cervia.

Settled though the State was for the time, its future was to be still more troublous than its past, and Guido was

in no danger of being carried away by the glory of his position; and this fact, as well as his poetical temperament, and the delicate feeling of which Boccaccio speaks, made him treat Dante with a respect very different from the careless and unrefined generosity of della Scala.

"A noble knight named Guido Novello da Polenta," says Boccaccio, "was at that time lord of Ravenna, the oldest and most famous town in the Romagna. He was a master in all the liberal arts, and delighted to honour great men who surpassed all others in attainment. When he learned that Dante Alighieri was an exile in Romagna, being already aware of his great fame, and knowing his worth, he hastened to invite him to his house and pay him every honour."

Guido's gracious spirit and fine feeling are revealed in the reason that Boccaccio gives for this prompt invitation, for he says that knowing that Dante was in need of fresh shelter, he did not wait to be asked to give it, "but reflecting what shame good men must feel in begging for benefits, he generously made offers to Dante, asking as a favour that which he knew Dante must in time be obliged to ask of him, namely, that Dante would be pleased to come and make his abode with him."

There is a further testimony to Guido's charm of disposition in the name bestowed upon him in the poems exchanged between Dante and Giovanni del Virgilio, so-called on account of his devotion to the works of Virgil. Virgilio, who was a professor in the University of Bologna, addressed Dante in a Latin poem, praising the *Divina Commedia* as a work noble and beautiful beyond compare, but reproaching him for having written it in the vulgar tongue, since by so doing he had cast his lofty theme before the unlearned as a pearl before swine. He begs him to bring his mind back from the unseen world to

the woes and strifes of his own country, adding that if this theme were to be nobly treated in the noble Latin tongue it would be certain to secure for him the laurel crown of poetry at Bologna.

To this poem Dante replied in an Eclogue in the style of Virgil, in which he calls himself Tityrus, while he gives the name of Melibœus to his friend Dino Perini, and of Mopsus to Virgilio. The only poet's wreath, he says, which shall ever crown his hoary head, is the one that he still hopes to receive from that city on the banks of the Arno where once his now whitened hair shone with the gold of youth; this hope may perhaps become reality when he has added his vision of the starry spheres to his former visions of Hell and Purgatory, and to this task his whole powers are dedicated.

To this, Virgilio replies in another poem, in which he sympathises with Dante's longing to return to Florence, but urges him in the meanwhile to come to Bologna. In Bologna, he says, he may feel assured of a fervent welcome, though the hospitality that awaits him must inevitably appear mean and poor after the stately court of the noble Iolas. This name is significant, for Plutarch tells us that Iolas, son of the King of Thessaly, was so renowned for his faithful affection and disinterested generosity, that lovers and friends used to go to his tomb to make their mutual vows of love and fidelity. That Dante accepted this name as entirely appropriate, is shown by his adoption of it in his reply. He says that the letter of Mopsus was brought to him by Alfesibeo, a constant friend and companion, who warned him not to listen to the tempting invitation, but to remain safely in the harbour that sheltered him, since if he left it, great dangers might befall him. Speaking of himself as Tityrus, he adds that though he was loath to disappoint his would-be

host, the arguments of Alfesibeo were so strongly endorsed by Iolas, who, unknown to them, had heard their conversation, that he was forced to obey.

An interesting fact may be noted in passing. A MS. copy of these poems preserved in Florence has notes in the margin which experts believe to have been made by Boccaccio; it is through these notes that Melibœus has been identified with Dino Perini, and Alfesibeo is described as *Magister Fiducius de' Milottis da Certaldo Medicus* (Dr. Fiducio dei Milotti of Certaldo). Certaldo in Tuscany is the place in which the family of Boccaccio had long resided, and where he himself died and was buried—it is only about thirty miles from Florence, and the fact that the physician was a fellow-Tuscan no doubt drew the exiled Dante to him, and made him a congenial friend and a companion for those saunterings through the pine-woods of Ravenna of which he speaks in this Eclogue.

Another friend with whom Dante must have held much intercourse was the Archbishop of Ravenna, Rainaldo Concorreggio, whose tomb may still be seen in the south transept of the Cathedral, opposite to the ancient sarcophagus in which a former Archbishop, Bonifazio de' Fieschi, ordered his dead body to be laid. Bonifazio had not left a very good reputation behind him, for Dante places him among the Gluttons in the *Purgatorio*, and intimates that he used his high office for his own advantage; but Rainaldo was a holy and zealous man, who served the Church with unceasing devotion and ruled his diocese with rare judgment. He, like Dante, had studied at the University of Bologna, and experts who have gone into the matter state that in all probability their terms of residence were kept at the same time; but whether this was so or not, a common tie existed between them which

was no less binding then than it is in the present day—men of the same public school or the same University feel a kinship that lasts to the end of their days—and even if Dante's studies at Bologna were carried on at a later date than those of Rainaldo, there would still have been a close bond of interest between the exiled poet and the powerful Archbishop.

Nor was it the memory of the past alone that drew them together. Rainaldo was possessed of unflagging energy, and his desire to preserve the ancient monuments of Ravenna led him into ever fresh activities. His treatise upon the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia is a proof both of his knowledge and his zeal, and it was through this long-dead Roman empress that a further link was to be forged between him and Dante.

Galla Placidia was the daughter of the Emperor Theodosius, and was born in Rome about 390 A.D. During the reign of her brother Honorius, she was taken as a hostage by Alaric the Goth; her position may well have seemed a desperate one, but when Alaric died and was succeeded by Ataulfus, the aspect of affairs changed. In Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* we are told the story of that strange conversion which was wrought in the mind of the barbarian by the glory of Rome and the beauty of Italy; his first desire, he said, had been to build up a Gothic empire on the ruins of the Roman, but his great wish now was to be remembered by posterity as one who used his power not to destroy, but to maintain.

Whether the charm and beauty of the captive princess had anything to do with this change of spirit we are not told, but in any case he begged her to marry him, and Galla Placidia agreed.

That she loved him sincerely is the opinion of the

historians, but an invasion of Spain was speedily followed by his assassination, and on her return to Ravenna she was given in marriage by her brother to his colleague, Constantius. The troubles of her life had been many, but more were to follow; Constantius died, Honorius turned against her, and with her two children she was forced to fly. But now the tide was at last to turn; the death of her brother was followed by a decree passed by her nephew, Theodosius II., Emperor of the East, that her young son Valentinian should become Emperor of the West, with herself as Regent, and they set out on their return to Ravenna. One last danger, however, was to befall them, for so fierce a storm broke over their ship that it seemed impossible that they could reach the land; in this extremity Galla Placidia vowed a church to S. John the Evangelist if they should be saved, and its erection was one of her first cares after her arrival in Ravenna.

It was this church that the Archbishop was now anxious to restore, and Vasari tells us that it was by the advice of Dante that Giotto was sent for to decorate its walls with frescoes. These frescoes have been so extensively restored and re-painted that art critics tell us they can hardly now be looked upon as Giotto's, but their interest remains for the lovers of Dante, since he must often have come to watch his friend at work upon them, and frequent consultations must have taken place between painter, poet and Archbishop.

Pietro Giardini, the notary, was another close friend and companion, for Boccaccio expressly mentions that he had long been a disciple of the poet. It was to Pietro Giardini that Dante's son told the strange dream that will be mentioned later.

Menghino Mezzani is another whose name has come down to us through the centuries; a notary, like Giardini,

his signature is often to be found in the records of the city of Ravenna. He was involved in the disasters that befell Guido Novello, after Dante's death, and suffered an imprisonment that lasted many years. It may well be that it was as a solace of his captivity that he composed his Commentary on the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*—a Commentary which has been generally considered to be of small worth, but one which is written in such a modest spirit as to disarm criticism, for in a sonnet addressed to Bernardo Canacci, composer of an epitaph for Dante's tomb, he speaks of himself as the humblest of all the followers of Dante, and thanks Canacci for paying that homage to the poet which he himself might not venture to offer.

In this safe shelter, then, with the generous and faithful Iolas as protector, and with a group of devoted friends around him, Dante remained in peace during the few short years left to him, and the city itself must have been as congenial to him as its noble ruler. Verona had been a meeting-place for fugitives and conspirators, for great captains of war and gay votaries of pleasure; its life was rich and crowded—eager, vivacious and highly coloured. But Ravenna, when Dante came to it, was already a city of the past: the day of its greatest renown was over and the tide of glory had ebbed from its shores. Verona, too, had a long history behind her, but the epoch of the Scaligeri was her flowering-time; while Ravenna had reached her zenith six hundred years before the poet entered her gates. In the days of the Roman Empire a harbour had been built there, capable of holding as many as two hundred and fifty ships, and between Classis—as the port was called—and Ravenna itself, a flourishing suburb sprang up which was known by the name of Cæsarea. Ravenna was then the principal port

on the eastern coast of Italy, and the direct means of communication between the eastern and the western worlds. The Roman poet, Martial, who died about 104 B.C., says that it was so difficult to get drinking water there, owing to the saltness of the marshes on which it was built, that it was cheaper to buy wine. But the scarcity of drinking water did not detract from the suitability of its position as a naval base, and the Emperor Augustus, nephew of Julius Cæsar, had a port constructed to guard the eastern side of Italy, as the port of Misenum guarded the western.

Ravenna was made an episcopal see in the year 44 A.D., and St. Apollinaris, who is said to have been a disciple of St. Peter, was appointed as first bishop. But already the deposits from the river Po were beginning to silt up the harbour, and Ravenna might soon have lost her place of pride if the Emperor Honorius, about the year 403 A.D., had not made it his retreat when Alaric descended upon Rome with his horde of barbarians. The strange vicissitudes of his sister's life have already been spoken of; but it is not only for her trials and sorrows that she is remembered, for it was during her reign that the city blossomed out into so rare a beauty, and in its churches we may still gaze upon those world-famous mosaics with which she caused them to be adorned—fresh and lovely as if the ages that have passed since they were executed had had no power to touch them.

Then came the downfall of Roman power and the rule of Odoacer, chief of the savage northern tribe of the Heruli; and when he in his turn was overthrown by Theoderic, chief of the Ostrogoths, Ravenna still remained the seat of government. Theoderic's great mausoleum, with its huge dome constructed out of a single block of Istrian stone, was as familiar to Dante as it

is to those who visit Ravenna to-day, and his eyes must have constantly rested upon those relics of Byzantine art that still draw throngs of travellers to the lovely but diminished City of the Marshes. It is impossible to look at the marvellous procession of saints and martyrs in the church of St. Apollonare Nuova without feeling that it must have suggested to his mind some of the imagery of the *Paradiso*; while in the desolate church of St. Apollonare in Classe, the figures of the faithful in the guise of sheep assembling in little groups, recall the lines in the third Canto of the *Purgatorio*, which describe the approach of the spirits:

> As sheep that step forth from their fold by one
> Or pairs, or three at once.

There are but few records of Dante's life in Ravenna, Boccaccio says that he dwelt there, "having given up all hope, though not all desire, of returning to Florence; he had several disciples in poetry at this time, especially in poetry of the vulgar tongue, which he for the first time raised up among us Italians, doing for our language what Homer did for Greek and Virgil for Latin."

How great this desire to return was we know from many passages in his writings; to the end of his days he never lost his love for Florence—"Mother of Great-souled Sons," as he calls her in one of his patriotic *Canzoni*, those songs which may, he says, go boldly and proudly into the land from which their writer is for ever shut out. His denunciations of her may be bitter—as in that *Canzone* in which he declares that Righteousness, Generosity and Temperance, are exiles with him from the city of his birth—yet he will not despair of her repentance, even though the light of the good men within her walls is clouded by error, for still the call Arise! Arise!

sounds in their ears, and it may be that they will hear it and respond to its summons.

And yet—though his heart thus turned back continually to the land of his love—Dante cannot have been altogether unhappy in Ravenna. Its atmosphere was congenial to him, his position was honourable and assured, his friends were many and sympathetic, and he had the company of his children. Of Antonia, the elder daughter, nothing is known except the fact that she was still living in 1332, and it may be that she remained with her mother in Florence; Pietro practised in the law courts at Verona, but there are records which show that he came to Ravenna and that he had a house in the *Contrada*, or Ward, of S. Stefano in Muro; Jacopo held two benefices in Ravenna, as has been proved by the discovery of a document, dated Jan. 1321, demanding the payment of his Papal dues, and describing him as "the son of Dante Alighieri of Florence"; this is, however, no proof that he was in Orders, as such benefices were often held by laymen. Boccaccio tells us that both sons wrote poetry, and both were diligent students of their father's works, so that they must have been in entire sympathy with him.

His younger daughter, to whom he had given the name of sacred memory, was a nun in the Convent of San Stefano dell' Uliva. It was to her that Boccaccio brought an offering of ten gold florins from the Società of Or San Michele in Florence, after her father's death; she seems to have lived to a good old age, for there is a record of a legacy left by her to the Convent in the year 1370.

But it was not only the sympathy and kindness of Guido Novello, not only the companionship of his children and friends, that brought solace to Dante in Ravenna. The work on which he was engaged was dearer to him than life itself, and it was in this city of inspiring traditions,

with no strife of warring factions to distract him, that he brought it to a triumphant conclusion, achieving not only the glorification of Beatrice and the relief of his own sorrow, but in and by his great poem fulfilling the hope that in his lifetime he so sadly relinquished—the hope of bearing a part in the high task of healing the divisions of his unhappy country and turning it from a battlefield of rival States into a glorious and United Italy.

[*Drawing by Ascanio Tealdi*

A HITHERTO UNREPRODUCED PORTRAIT OF DANTE, from the 14th century commentary on the *Divina Commedia* by F Buti. The MS. and Illuminations are the work of Fra Gambacori of Pisa.

Part III.

Poet and Seer.

"His will is our peace."
Paradiso, Canto III. 85.

THE *Divina Commedia*, in spite of its difficulty—a difficulty that in places amounts to absolute obscurity—has an undying interest for readers of all nations, classes and degrees. The more that it is studied the more its beauties impress themselves upon the mind, and its fame has steadily increased during the last six centuries, until from being scarcely heard of outside the land of its birth, it is now known and read through the whole civilised world.

The first reason for this wide-spread interest is found in the fact that the poem is concerned, not with the varying fortunes, nor with the changing circumstances, of mankind, but with the soul itself—a theme that is unalterable, and one which affects the whole human race. Our own Chaucer—born only twenty years after Dante's death—was quick to notice this quality, for in *The Wyf of Bathe's Tale* he quotes three pregnant lines from the 7th Canto of the *Purgatorio*:

Wel can the wyse poet of Florence,
That hight Dant, speken in this sentence,
Lo in swich maner rym is Dantes tale:
"Ful selde up ryseth by his branches smale
Prowesse of man, for God, of his goodnesse,
Wol that of hym we clayme our gentilesse."

God's goodness, and the efforts of man to rise from his dead self to higher things, these are the mighty matters with which Dante concerns himself, but not all his readers have been so discerning as Chaucer, and there have been some who have accused him of vanity and egotism in imagining that there was any particular value in the struggles and aspirations of his individual soul. Leigh Hunt, in his *Stories from the Italian Poets*, remarks, after some pages of condescending criticism: "Dante, in constituting himself the hero of his poem, not only renders Nature, in the general impression, as dreary as himself, in spite of the occasional beautiful pictures he draws of her, but narrows her very immensity into his pettiness."

But a remark such as this only reveals its writer's complete misconception of the *Divina Commedia*; the hero of the poem is not Dante, but Everyman, and it is not his own personal redemption and purification that so passionately obsesses him, but the redemption and purification of the whole human race. It is as a type and not as an individual that we are to regard him—the spiritual experiences through which he passes are common to all mortals, like them he falls into sin, like them he is shown the punishment of sin, and it is in the name of all mankind that he repents, that he is purified, and that he is admitted to the company of the redeemed.

And if his theme is great, great also is the guise in which he depicts it. Sin, repentance and pardon, could have been described as taking place during the span of a human life on earth; but Dante was not only a philosopher and theologian, he was one of the finest dramatic poets the world has ever seen, and with a consummate stroke of genius he cast this record of human experience into the form of a journey through the unseen world, where in the successive stages of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, he

portrays, rather than describes, the punishment of sin and the purification of the soul, and this with so vivid and so unerring a touch that the poem is as true to life to-day as it was when first written.

That Dante was not the first to conceive such a journey, we need no reminder. Homer, in the *Odyssey*, tells us how Ulysses, the Jove-born son of Laertes, visited the "joyless regions of the dead"; Virgil describes in fullest detail the passage of Æneas, "illustrious for piety and for arms," through the regions peopled by the Shades; Cicero relates the vision shown to him by Scipio Africanus of the Zones and Spheres of the Unseen World, and Walkelin of Anjou, in the year 1091, declares that when on his way to administer the last rites to a dying man, he was carried off by spirits to see the punishment of the wicked in Hell—punishments which he describes at length. Writing of Æneas in *The House of Fame*, Chaucer says:

> And euery tormente eek in helle
> Saw he, which is longe to telle,
> Which who-soe willeth for to knowe
> He must rede many a rowe
> On Virgile or on Claudian,
> Or Daunte, that hit telle can.

But though Dante followed in the footsteps of others, his claim to originality is not thereby diminished; like Shakespeare, he did not slavishly copy the sources from which he drew his inspiration—he breathed fresh life into them, and in so doing he made them his own. Homer and Virgil, Claudian and Cicero, may have supplied him with images of the Nether Regions, the Elysian Fields, and the Shades, by which they were peopled; but those images were revivified and irradiated by him with Love and Hope and Faith, even as statues of Mars or of Venus

were annexed by the Church in her early days and transformed by baptism into the Virgin Mary and St. John.

But undying as is the interest of the poem, and unfading as are its beauties, there is one aspect of it in which its effect has been diminished, if not entirely destroyed, by the lapse of time. That it should have created the most intense excitement when it was first given to the world, we can readily understand when we remember that the allusions to persons and events with which it is filled—allusions that present-day readers find confusing, if not incomprehensible—were then not only piquant, but absolutely startling, and in many cases provocative. We have only to picture to ourselves the publication of such a poem in our own day, a poem meting out the direst punishments to well-known people —members of the Government, highly placed officials, admirals, generals, heads of colleges, and professors, bishops on the bench, and kings upon their thrones—to realise the tremendous sensation that it created.

The few modern attempts in this direction have shown us what an excitement such a pillory causes, but fear of the libel laws makes such attempts mild indeed when we compare them with those allusions in the *Divina Commedia*, which readers of to-day so often find dull and wearisome. The wonder is that Dante should ever have ventured to allow a book to see the light in which sons and daughters might find their parents, brothers their sisters, husbands their wives, and wives their husbands, condemned to horrible punishments for sins that are described in the plainest terms. Nor was it only the dead who were thus pilloried. In the thirty-third Canto of the *Inferno*, for example, the spirits of Alberigo de' Manfredi and Branca d'Oria of Faenza—who were both living in 1300 and who were both known to have committed

murder—are said to be in hell, while their bodies remain on earth, tenanted by demons. Even when the spirits are not undergoing punishment for sin, their earthly foibles are held up to our gaze, as in the case of Belacqua, the musical instrument maker of Florence, whom Dante had laughed at in old days for the laziness that made him sit outside his door, his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands, and whom he now represents as sitting at the foot of the Mount of Purgatory in the old familiar attitude, unable to climb because in life he was too indolent to repent.

But if the *Divina Commedia* had been no more than a satirical and somewhat scandalous work, its fame would soon have faded and died. That Dante had a very different intention in view we know from the letter that he wrote to Can Grande on the subject. Man's freewill, and the extent to which he is exposed by his merits and demerits to the rewards and punishments of justice, is, he says, the theme of the work; and we need not be surprised by its difficulty since he adds that the meaning is wrapped in one involution after another—literal, allegorical, anagogical and moral. As an explanatory example he takes a verse from a Psalm: "When Israel came out of Egypt and the house of Jacob from among the strange people, Judah was his sanctuary and Israel his dominion." The literal sense of this verse, he says, is the fact of the departure from Egypt; the allegorical, our redemption through Christ; the moral, the soul's conversion from sin to grace; the anagogic (or spiritual) the passage of the sanctified from the bondage of earthly corruption to the eternal liberty of the celestial glory.

That the poem was no less important than difficult was quickly recognised in Italy, for as early as 1350 the Archbishop of Milan appointed a small body of learned

men to write an exhaustive commentary upon it, although not only Dante's sons, but several of his friends and admirers had already written explanatory descriptions.

But not content with written comments and explanations, the authorities of Florence, in response to a request signed by many of the citizens, resolved on founding a Dante Lectureship, and in 1373 a decree was passed assigning a yearly salary of a hundred florins, and appointing Boccaccio to the post.

No two men can have seemed more unlike than Dante and his first exponent, for Boccaccio was as light-hearted and pleasure-loving as Dante was stern and ascetic; yet Boccaccio entered deeply into the spirit of the poet's writings, and it is certainly a striking fact that he who dared to write of Dante's banishment, "If all the other wrongs that Florence hath wrought could be hidden from the all-seeing eyes of God, would not this one suffice to call down His wrath upon her,"* should, some twenty years later, have been selected by the Government to expound his works to the citizens.

These lectures were first given in the ancient church of S. Stefano, which stands in a little piazza opening out of the Por Santa Maria.

The example of Florence was soon followed by other cities: Benvenuto da Imola was appointed to a similar lectureship in Bologna; Francesco da Buti in Pisa, and others were established in Venice, Piacenza and other places before the end of the fourteenth century.

This fact is certainly a very striking one, and if we are ever inclined to blame Italy for the pains and privations that Dante had to endure, we may contrast the admiration lavished upon his work with the cloud that for so many years obscured Shakespeare's reputation, and remember

* *Vita di Dante*.

with shame that Pope declared him deficient in artistic quality, that Pepys called the *Midsummer Night's Dream* "a most insipid and ridiculous play," and that Evelyn spoke of *Hamlet* as disgusting to a refined age.

That the lofty grandeur of the poem was fully realised is shown by the fact that the word "divine" was early added to its title. Dante had called it simply *La Commedia*, explaining his choice of the title by saying that since it was a dialogue in the vernacular tongue and had not a sad ending, it was no tragedy, and must therefore be a comedy. But Dante was no sooner dead than those who read his poem felt that it was possessed of a celestial power and beauty that made the word comedy by itself inappropriate and inadequate, and as the *Divina Commedia* it has come down to us through the ages.

The historical, geographical and biographical allusions, with which the poem bristles, make it impossible to understand without a fully annotated edition, but its main idea is not difficult to grasp. The *Vita Nuova*, as we have seen, is dominated from start to finish by the number nine; Beatrice herself is called a nine, i.e. a soul that is perfect because it is rooted in three, the number of the Holy Trinity. The *Divina Commedia* is dominated by the number three, because it deals with those high and heavenly truths of which the Holy Trinity is the supreme manifestation, and because Beatrice has now been so permeated by the Divine nature that she is no longer a human miracle, but a celestial emanation.

The poem is divided into three parts—the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio*, and the *Paradiso*—and each of these contains thirty-three Cantos (the number of Christ's years upon earth), the extra Canto of the *Inferno* being an introduction to the whole. Nor is this all; the poem is

composed in what is called the *Terza Rima*, or rhyme of three; in every three lines there are two that rhyme, while the middle line carries on the next group of three, rhyming with its first and third line, the middle line again carrying on in its turn, and so right through each Canto to the end of the poem. The effect of this highly complex scheme is very beautiful, but it is so difficult of accomplishment in English that scarcely any translator has attempted it. The greatest English master of the *terza rima* is Shelley, who used it in several of his shorter poems and also in *The Triumph of Life*—that incomparable fragment left unfinished at his death. In it he alludes to Dante:

> who, from the lowest depths of hell,
> Through every Paradise and through all glory,
> Love led serene, and who returned to tell
> The words of hate and awe, the wondrous story
> How all things are transfigured except Love.

A small portion of the *Purgatorio* was so beautifully translated by him that it is impossible not to regret that his brief span of life left him no time to complete the work. A comparison of a few lines with the same passage in Cary's blank verse translation will show the effect of the *terza rima*. The description of the forest in the twenty-eighth Canto of the *Purgatorio* was no doubt inspired by the immemorial pine forests of Ravenna among which Dante must so often have walked, and in the original his lines seem to breathe the sound of the winds that sigh through their branches. Cary translates the passage thus:

> Through that celestial forest, whose thick shade
> With lively greenness the new-springing day
> Attempered, eager now to roam, and search
> Its limits round, forthwith I left the bank;

Along the champain leisurely my way
Pursuing, o'er the ground, that on all sides
Delicious odour breathed. A pleasant air
That intermitted never, never veered,
Smote on my temples, gently, as a wind
Of softest influence; at which the sprays
Obedient all, leaned trembling to that part
Where first the holy mountain casts his shade. Etc.

This gives the sense of the text, but Shelley, while giving the sense, succeeds in conveying the music also.

Earnest to explore, within, around,
That divine wood, whose thick, green, living roof,
Tempered the young day to the sight, I wound
Up a green slope, beneath the starry roof,
With slow, slow steps, leaving the mountain's steep,
And sought those leafy labyrinths, motion-proof
Against the air, that in the stillness, deep
And solemn, struck upon my forehead bare,
Like the sweet breathing of a child in sleep:
Already had I lost myself so far
Amid that tangled wilderness, that I
Perceived not where I entered, but no fear
Of wandering from my way disturbed, when nigh
A little stream appeared—the grass that grew
Thick on its banks impeded suddenly
My going on; water, of purest dew
On earth, would appear turbid and impure
Compared with this, whose unconcealing hue
Dark, dark, yet clear, moved under the obscure
Of the close boughs, whose interwoven looms
No rays of moon or sunlight would endure.

Mrs. Oliphant, in her exposition of the *Divina Commedia*, translates several passages in the *terza rima*, which, though hardly equal to Shelley's, have yet a great charm, but Italian is a language that lends itself to rhyme, whereas English presents great difficulties in this respect, and the translators who have ventured on a complete

rhymed version of the poem have found the true *terza rima* impossible of achievement. Dean Plumptre's translation has many virtues, and that by Wright has passages of much beauty, of which one may be quoted as a sample. The lines describing the meeting of Dante and Beatrice in the thirtieth Canto of the *Purgatorio* are thus translated by Cary:

I have beheld ere now, at break of day
The eastern clime all roseate; and the sky
Opposed, one deep and beautiful serene;
And the sun's face so shaded, and with mists
Attempered, at his rising, that the eye
Long while endured the sight; thus, in a cloud
Of flowers, that from those hands angelic rose,
And down within and outside of the car
Fell showering, in white veil with olive wreathed,
A virgin in my view appeared, beneath
Green mantle, robed in hue of living flame;
And o'er my spirit, that so long a time
Had from her presence felt no shuddering dread,
Albeit mine eyes discerned her not, there moved
A hidden virtue from her, at whose touch
The power of ancient love was strong within me.

Wright gives the same passage as follows:

Oft have I seen how all the East was crowned
At very break of day with roseate hue,
And all the sky beside serener found,
And the sun's face o'er-clouded came in view,
The vapours so attempering its powers
That the eye gazed long while, nor weary grew;
And so, envelopped in a cloud of flowers,
Which leapt up, scattered by angelic hands,
And part within and part without sent showers,
Clad in white veil, with olive-wreathed bands,
A lady in a mantle bright and green
O'er robe of fiery glow before me stands.
And then my spirit which so long had been

Without the wonder that had once dismayed
When that dear presence by mine eyes was seen,
Though nothing more to vision was displayed,
Through secret power that passed from her to me
The mighty power of ancient love obeyed.

But from the metre of the poem we must now pass to the poem itself. The year 1300 was chosen by Dante for its date, because it was his own thirty-fifth year of life —the year, he tells us in the fourth treatise of the *Convivio*, that is the highest point of human existence when measured by the Psalmist's span of three score years and ten—"the height or supreme point, of our arc, or bow, is in the thirty-fifth year; just so much as this age has of ascent, so much it ought to have of descent, and this ascent passes into descent, as it were, at the point, the centre, where one would hold the bow in the hand, at which place a slight flexion may be discerned."

It is with the statement of his age and the conditions in which he found himself that the Introductory Canto of the *Inferno* opens:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
Che la diritta via era smarrita.
Ahi, quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura
Questa selva selvaggia ed aspra e forte,
Che nel pensier rinnova la paura!
Tanto è amara, che poco è più morte:
Ma per trattar del ben ch' i' vi trovai,
Dirò dell' altre cose, ch'io v'ho scorte.

Which may be thus translated:

In this life's journey I had come mid-way,
When lo! I found myself in a dark wood,
From the well-beaten track gone far astray;
And hard it is to tell how those trees stood,

So wild and thick they were, so close wreathed-in,
That to recall them wakens my dismay—
Dismay so bitter that to death 'tis kin.
But good I found there too, and so to tell
Of all those other things I will begin.

The "dark wood" signifies the maze of sin and folly, of feud and faction, in which the world was struggling—Dante taking himself as the representative of Mankind who has missed the way in that network of deceit and treachery and self-seeking. The word "way," coming thus at the outset of the poem, strikes its keynote: Dante's experiences have been many and varied, his trials have been sharp and his disappointments heavy, but now that he sets himself to the great task of his life—looking back to the past and on to the future from this middle point of his journey—he gives it as his deliberate opinion that man's passage through this dark and tangled world is no blind chance, but that his steps are divinely ordered; a "way" is laid down for him to walk in, and even though he should wander from the right path he need not despair of once more finding it and of being led out of the dark forest.

From the twenty-first Canto of the *Inferno* we know what day it was on which Dante began his journey through the unseen world:

Yesterday, later by five hours than now,
Twelve hundred, three score years and six, had filled
The circuit of their course, since here the way
Was broken.

The years of Dante's life are added to those between his birth and the Incarnation of Christ, which gives the year 1300. As to the day, Virgil here tells him that the "breaking of the way" was due to the convulsion that

rent the nether world when Christ was crucified, and that after His death He descended into Hell—

> Then through all its bounds
> Such trembling seized the deep concave and foul
> I thought the Universe was thrilled with love.
> (Canto XII.)

It is on the anniversary of this tremendous event that Dante begins his journey, and as Good Friday fell on April the eighth in the year 1300, we have the exact date fixed, a date that it is very necessary to keep in mind in reading the poem, since Dante speaks of many events already past in the future tense.

On Good Friday, then, "at morning's prime," he finds himself wandering in the wood, lost and lonely, and gropes his way along until he reaches the Mountain—symbol of that holiness of which the Psalmist speaks when he says that he "will ascend into God's holy hill"—and to his joy and comfort finds himself once more in the light of the sun.

Another point that must be kept in mind from the start, is that all Dante's allusions to the sun, moon and stars, refer to the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, and not to the modern, or Copernican. Copernicus, and Galileo after him, taught that the sun is the centre of our Universe, and that the earth is but one of the planets that revolve round it, while the moon revolves round the earth; Ptolemy taught that the earth is the centre of the universe, that it is immovable, and that the sun revolves round it—statements that were generally believed in till the end of the sixteenth century. It is a curious fact that Milton, possessed of a profound understanding and with the inestimable advantage of having talked with Galileo during his stay in Italy, should yet seem unable to relinquish his belief in the Ptolemaic system and mingles

it with the Copernican in a most bewildering manner in *Paradise Lost*.

After allowing his wearied body to take a short repose—a repose quaintly depicted by the artist whose illumination in one of the early MSS. preserved in the Laurentian Library forms the frontispiece of this book—Dante sets out to climb the Holy Hill, and encounters a panther, a lion and a she-wolf—beasts, which some commentators take as symbols of Lust, Pride and Avarice, and others as symbols of the terrorising powers of Florence, France and Rome. It is very probable that both explanations are correct, for moral as well as political confusion is symbolised by the entangling forest. These fierce assailants filled Dante's heart with fear, so that he would have turned back if the poet Virgil had not appeared and told him that Beatrice had come down to him from her high place in heaven and bade him go to the aid of her former friend, and guide his steps safely through the perilous paths that he must tread.

This "deliverance" forms what may be called the plot of the poem. Beatrice is the type of Divine Wisdom, Virgil, the type of Human Virtue; Virgil can show him the consequences of Sin and its Purification, but Beatrice must lead him through the gate of Paradise and show him that its joys consist in eternal contemplation of the glory and love of God. In choosing Beatrice as the type of Divine Wisdom, Dante fulfils his vow that he will write of her what has never yet been written of any mortal woman. In choosing Virgil as the type of Human Virtue, he not only expresses his own reverence for the Roman poet, but recognises the tradition which makes him the herald of Christ's coming. This belief was based upon the remarkable points of resemblance between his *Pollio*, or Fourth Eclogue, and certain passages of Isaiah. The

Child, whose birth is to bring peace to earth, is said by some to have been the son of Pollio, the great Roman Consul who was instrumental in negotiating the Peace of Brundisium; by others, to have been the young Marcellus, adopted son of the Emperor Augustus, whose death Virgil afterwards lamented in touching strains in the sixth Book of the *Æneid*. There is a remarkable accord between Virgil's prophecies and those of Isaiah—wild beasts lying down together and all harm and evil eliminated from a regenerate earth. It is to these prophecies that Tennyson alludes in the poem written for the nineteenth centenary of Virgil's death, at the request of the people of Mantua:

> Chanter of the Pollio, glorying in the blissful years again to be,
> Summers of the snakeless meadows, unlaborious earth and oarless sea.

Pope, who confessedly framed his poem, *The Messiah*, on the Fourth Eclogue, seems to think that he was the first to discover this resemblance, for he says in his preface: "In reading several passages of the Prophet Isaiah which foretell the coming of Christ and the felicities attending it, I could not but observe a remarkable parity between many of his thoughts and those in the *Pollio* of Virgil." But as a matter of fact, it was pointed out in very early times and became almost an article of faith in the Christian Church. The Emperor Constantine, for example, in his Oration to the Assembly of the Saints, delivered in the early part of the fourth century, examines the Fourth Eclogue at length and finds prophecies of Christ and revelations of Christian doctrine in every line. Dante evidently held that Virgil did foretell Christ, though he could not profit by his own prediction—as we shall see in the *Purgatorio*.

With Virgil as guide, Dante once more sets out on his journey, and here we are met by an interesting point. Many of his translators are so obsessed by the idea that a journey to the Infernal Regions must be a *descent* that they render the word *alto* in the last line of the second Canto:

Entrai per lo cammino alto e silvestro,

as "deep," or "profound," while *silvestro* is rendered as "wild," or even in some cases as "savage." But Italian linguistic authorities tell us that *alto* can only be used in the sense of "deep" when it is applied to the sea, and that when referring to land it always carries the suggestion of height; and that though *silvestro* is sometimes used in the sense of "wild" when applied to animals—i.e. animals that live in woods or jungles—it is always used in the sense of lonely and wooded when applied to scenery. The way on which Dante now entered did not lead back through the *selva selvaggia*—savage wood, in which he had lost himself, it was ascending and tree-shaded, as were the cypress-lined paths of Pilgrimage, so many of which are to be seen in Tuscany in the present day; but there is surely no difficulty in such a rendering of the passage, for the Infernal Regions were supposed to lie under the centre of the earth, and the centre of the earth was said to be Jerusalem, and the centre of Jerusalem was the Hill of Calvary. It is on Good Friday that Dante reaches the gates of the City of Woe—the day on which all Christians remember the Sacrifice of the Cross—the Sacrifice which secured the fulfilment of the promise, "The Gates of Hell shall not prevail against thee." It is after he and Virgil have entered the gates that the descent begins; Hell is revealed to Dante as an inverted cone—or crater—divided into nine circles which narrow

[*Photograph A. T.*

A Path of Pilgrimage.

down to an innermost depth where Lucifer is imprisoned in eternal ice and vents his rage at his overthrow upon the sinners condemned to share his doom.

It is helpful to the clear understanding of the *Divina Commedia* if it is kept in mind from the start that not only Hell, but Purgatory and Paradise, also, are divided into nine sections, a different word being used in each case. In the *Inferno* the word used is *cerchio*, or circle; in the *Purgatorio*, *cornice*—a word which some translators have rendered as "ledge," while others simply use the English word *cornice*. The word *ridge* may perhaps give a more correct idea of Dante's meaning than *ledge*, since both the Italian and the English *cornice* convey the impression of something that projects rather than of something that is cut back. In the *Paradiso* the word *stella* is used, since Dante follows the Ptolemaic division of the heavens into starry spheres.

The Circles in the *Inferno* are described as being cut as it were like shelves round the inside of the crater, and the two poets pass round each Circle and then descend the precipitous way that divides it from the one next below it. In the *Purgatorio* the process is exactly the reverse; the poets traverse each ledge, or ridge, and then ascend to the next above it. In the *Paradiso*, toil and effort are over, and therefore Dante has no need to climb from one Sphere to the other; he gazes on Beatrice, she who has already been made one with the Blessed, and the light of her star-like eyes draws him imperceptibly onward and upward, a beautiful picture of the purifying and ennobling influence of true Love upon the mind. Dante and Virgil have now reached the gates of Hell, and before they enter the dread region they pause to read the inscription which Dante sees for the first time; to Virgil it is already familiar, since his dwelling is in Limbo,

the first Circle of Hell, and it is from that Circle that Beatrice summoned him to go to Dante's aid. The inscription is both terrible and terrifying:

> Through me you pass into the city of woe;
> Through me you pass into eternal pain;
> Through me among the people lost for aye.
> Justice the Founder of my fabric moved,
> To rear me was the task of Power divine,
> Supremest wisdom and primeval Love.
> Before me things create were none, save things
> Eternal, and eternal I endure.
> All hope abandon, ye who enter here.

At sight of these words, Dante trembles, but Virgil draws him on, and they have no sooner entered than cries of anger, groans of misery, and sighs of despair, smite upon his ears, so that tears rush to his eyes at the sound. He asks Virgil who these wretched spirits are, and is told that they are those who in life were guilty of apathy, they lived for self alone, caring for nothing, untouched alike by good or evil. Having never really lived, he says, they can never die, and they drag out a miserable existence just inside the gate of Hell—

> Mercy and justice both alike disdain them,
> Upon them waste no words, glance and pass by.

They move on, and Dante sees a crowd of shivering spirits waiting by the banks of a stream, and Virgil tells him that these are the wicked who are waiting for Charon's boat to pass over the Acheron—the death-dark river of the classical writers. The boat appears upon the water, and Charon at first refuses to take a living man on board, but yields to Virgil's demand, and allows Dante to take his place among the other passengers. They cross the river and land on the opposite bank, where awe

and terror so overcome the poet that he sinks down unconscious. Here he lies until a sound like mighty thunder scatters his stupor, and gazing round to see what manner of place this is to which he has come, he is told by Virgil, who is as pale with pity as Dante is with fear, that the sound he hears is the wailing of an infinite multitude of souls in anguish, but that they must go on boldly, and with these words he leads him to the entrance into the first Circle. Climbing down through the opening, Dante finds himself in a heavy silence that is only broken with sighs; the change from the tumult of cries that they have just left is very striking, but Dante ventures to put no question, and Virgil tells him that he wishes him to understand the nature of the place to which they have come; he, for his part, feels no fear, since this is the Circle in which his own habitation is fixed, but his heart goes out in continual pity to his fellow-prisoners. They do not cry or groan, for they are not being actively tormented, but they sigh, for their unconscious alienation from the God they have never known bars them for ever from His presence. This place is called Limbo, and Dante's use of the name is an instance of the way in which he adopted things Pagan and made them Christian; Virgil, in the *Æneid*, describes Limbo as the place where dwell the weeping ghosts of infants, bereaved of life before they have tasted it; Dante describes it as the home of those souls who lacked baptism, and therefore never passed through the portals of the true life, the life of faith. He puts this explanation into Virgil's mouth and goes on to tell how his guide pointed out many whose names were familiar to him—Homer, Plato, Socrates, Ptolemy, Galen, and others. Dante would gladly have lingered among these spirits whom he had honoured on earth, and in the noble castle where they dwelt, with its

seven walls of Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, Music, Arithmetic, Geometry, and Astronomy—or in the bright meadows that lie beyond it; but Virgil warns him that they must not delay their journey, and draws him on to the descent into the second Circle.

At the gate of this second Circle sits Minos, the implacable judge. Dante gives him this name in allusion to Minos, the celebrated law-giver of Crete, but he is intended here as a symbol of the inward judge—Conscience—who holds his secret tribunal in the sinner's own breast. In this Circle they meet the souls of those who have sinned through excessive love—Helen, Cleopatra, and the like, and here it is that he sees Francesca da Rimini, driven ceaselessly on the wind with her lover by her side.

If Carlyle had written on Dante with the fuller information that we have to-day, he would not have made the following comment in *The Hero as Poet*: "Strange to think—Dante was the friend of this poor Francesca's father; Francesca herself may have sat upon the poet's knee, as a bright, innocent little child." Dante's friend was not Guido Vecchio, father of Francesca, but Guido Novello, her nephew; and since her tragic death took place about 1285 she was probably born at, or near, the time of the poet's own birth. A generation had passed away before Dante took refuge at Guido Novello's Court; and as the *Inferno* was already written before he came there, no question of violation of family secrets by a guest could possibly arise. It is Aristotle who tells us that pain is purged with pity; and as we have already seen, the exquisite pity with which Dante handled that painful incident of the history of the house of Polenta, was grateful rather than displeasing to Guido Novello.

Guido Vecchio became Podestà of Ravenna in 1275, and after awhile, wishing to make himself secure in his lordship,

he asked aid of the Malatesta family, rulers of Rimini. With their help he established his power firmly, and to make the bond between them still stronger he offered his beautiful daughter Francesca as a wife for Gianciotto, the heir to the Malatesta territories. The alliance suited both rulers; but since Gianciotto was ugly and uncouth and his younger brother Paolo was handsome and accomplished, Paolo was sent to Ravenna to be married by proxy to his brother's lovely young bride—the unfortunate girl being deluded into the belief that he was to be her husband. Arrived at Rimini, the awful truth burst upon her, and the rest of the story is well known; consumed with love for one another, they managed to keep their secret for a time, but one day as they read the story of Lancelot's love for Guinevere, Gianciotto burst in upon them and slew them both.

No lines, in the poetry of any language, are more beautiful than those which Dante puts into the mouth of Francesca:

Nessun maggior dolore,
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria,

lines which are perfectly expressed in Tennyson's unforgettable words:

A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things.

But the thought was not an original one; Dante tells us in the second book of the *Convivio* that Boethius was one of the classical writers who had led him to the study of philosophy, and in the pages of Boethius the following sentence is to be found: *In omni adversitate fortunæ, infelicissimum genus est infortunii fuisse felicem et non esse.**

* De Consolat. Philos. Lib. II. Prosa 4.

A sentence which Chaucer renders in his translation of the *De Consolatione*—"For in alle adversitee of fortune, the most unsely kinde of contrarious fortune is to han ben weleful."

Francesca adds the comment:

> *e ciò sa il tuo dottore*
> (And this thy teacher knows).

The thought being taken from Boethius, some commentators have said that it is he who is meant by "thy teacher"; but since *il mio dottore* is the term by which Dante describes Virgil throughout the *Divina Commedia*, it is more probable that he implies that from the said shades of Limbo, Virgil looked back regretfully to former days of happiness.

Since Chaucer was a student of Dante, the lines in his *Troilus and Cressida* (Book III., 1625) may be derived from this passage, unless they were taken from Boethius direct:

> For of fortune's sharp adversitee
> The worste kinde of infortune is this,
> A man to have ben in prosperitee,
> And it remembren, when it passed is.

Longfellow's translation of the *Divina Commedia*, in many places so felicitous, is not as successful as Cary's in the rendering of this exquisite passage. Cary gives it as follows:

> One day
> For our delight we read of Lancelot
> How him love thralled. Alone we were, and no
> Suspicion near us. Oft-times by that reading
> Our eyes were drawn together, and the hue
> Fled from our altered cheek. But at one point
> Alone we fell. When of that smile we read,
> The wishèd smile, so rapturously kissed

By one so deep in love, then he, who ne'er
From me shall separate, at once my lips
All trembling kissed. The book and writer both
Were love's purveyors. In its leaves that day
We read no more." While thus one spirit spake
The other wailed so sorely, that heart-struck
I, through compassion fainting, seemed not far
From death, and like a corse fell to the ground.

It is during this swoon that Dante is carried by Virgil into the third Circle, for he says that when his senses returned to him after the trance into which his pity for the tragic fate of the lovers had thrown him, he found himself in a place where new sorrows, and new tormented souls, surrounded him on every side.

It is disgust, and not compassion, that now moves him; those who fell through love were sinners, but though they fell, there was still a wild, sad beauty, about them that touched the chords of human sympathy. But the sinners of the third Circle have no such redeeming trait, they are the gluttons, loathsome from their self-indulgence while on earth; and though it horrifies him to see Cerberus—hateful and savage monster—biting and worrying them, he feels that they deserve their punishment since they lived lives that were "impious and godless."

It is here that he sees Ciacco (Hog), a man well-known in Florence in Dante's youth, to whom this opprobrious nickname was given on account of his greed. It is on the night of Good Friday, 1300, that Dante is supposed to meet him, so that the predictions that he utters of the strife between the Bianchi and Neri had in reality taken place.

Boccaccio, in his Commentary, tells us that Ciacco was notorious in Florence for the way in which he fastened himself upon the rich and great, so that when he was not invited to dine he invited himself, and that all his care in

life was to enjoy good cheer. Dante takes him as a type of all those who sin through self-indulgence, and the punishment meted out to them is to lie in mud and mire, with a horrible rain falling upon them, while Cerberus fastens his teeth in their shuddering forms—a ghastly contrast to their past delights of mirth and revelry and delicious feastings.

As they approach the steep stairway to the fourth Circle they find it guarded by "Pluto, the great enemy." Pluto, in ancient mythology, was the god of the Lower Regions, but critics agree for the most part in saying that Dante here confuses him—perhaps purposely—with Plutus the god of riches. The Scriptures tell us that the love of money is the root of all evil; and Dante describes the Avaricious, who are punished in this Circle, as completely dominated, mind and body, by their sin. Their punishment is to roll heavy weights without ceasing, never making any real advance, turning back, falling against each other, howling with misery and fatigue, yet never able to escape from their burdens. The Prodigals are punished in the same way, and the seeming strangeness of this is explained by the fact that both classes alike have made a wrong use of money and completely misunderstood its place in the scheme of human life.

The way down to the fifth Circle is a difficult one, for the two poets have to descend through a cleft in the rocks which has been made by the incessant falling of the dark waters of the stream known to classical writers as the Styx. "In company with this dark water," Dante says, they climbed down through the opening, and found themselves in the place where those who have sinned through anger are for ever fighting and tearing each other in the inky depths of the Stygian lake. Passing round the lake, they come to the base of a tall tower from which

a beacon light shines out, and in response to this signal a boat is seen coming towards them in which they take their seats. As they are rowed across the lake, Dante sees the spirit of Filippo Argenti, all covered with dreadful mire, and is saved by Virgil from being attacked by him. This is that Filippo Argenti who roused the hatred of the Florentines by his overbearing behaviour; the nickname of Argenti was given to him, according to Boccaccio, because the horse on which he used to ride through the streets of the city, trampling down all who came in his way, was shod with silver shoes.

On reaching the other side of the lake, the two poets come to the city of Dis—the fabled abode of the Dead—but its gates are closed to them, and it is not until an Angel appears and touches the portal with his wand that it flies open. Having entered, they find in the sixth Circle the heretics from the true faith lying in open tombs, with some of whom Dante talks, among them, with Cavalcante, the father of his friend, Guido.

It was in August, 1300, that Guido died, as the result of his exile to Sarzana, so that at Easter in that year he was still alive, and it might have been thought that Dante would have made no mention of one, the remembrance of whom must have been so bitter to him. But it was not his way to shirk any painful subject, either in his own life or the lives of others, and he alludes to the close friendship that had existed between them when he describes Cavalcante's surprise that his son is not with Dante. The poet points out that he is not alone, and adds that his companion is one whom Guido perchance "had in contempt," a remark which has been variously explained by the commentators as referring to Guido's small regard to Virgil as an author, or for Latin poetry as

compared with the vernacular, or for poetry as compared with philosophy.

Cavalcante, however, seizes upon one word in the reply, and exclaims:

> "How! saidst thou, he *had*?
> No longer lives he? Strikes not on his eye
> The blessed daylight?" Then, of some delay
> I made ere my reply, aware, down fell
> Supine, nor after forth appeared he more.

The father's despair at the mere suspicion that his son is dead, is surely an echo of Dante's grief at the death which had in reality taken place—a death which he must have felt was in some measure due to his own stern, though just sentence.

Before entering the seventh Circle, Dante stands awhile on a high, rocky wall, looking down into the gulf below, while Virgil explains to him what sinners he will find in the eighth, ninth and tenth Circles—the malicious, the fraudulent, the violent, the treacherous, and others. At the end of this Canto there is an allusion to the stars which shows that the time is now dawn on the second day of the journey, i.e. Easter Eve. They then clamber down the side of the precipice and visit in turn each of the rounds into which these three Circles are divided, witnessing the infliction of many dreadful torments. It has sometimes been said that Dante has a most materialistic mind, since the punishments he describes are of such a detailed and horrible character; but it must be remembered that all these punishments are to be understood symbolically, and that the great lesson which he desires to drive home is that sin unrepented of becomes its own punishment—the soul being eternally imprisoned in what was once its cherished indulgence. His descriptions, in fact, embody the very spirit of the words of the

Book of Revelation—"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; he that is filthy, let him be filthy still."

In the ninth Circle they find Count Ugolino of Pisa, who tells the ghastly story of his imprisonment in the Hunger Tower, and of the starvation of himself and his sons, when the key of their dungeon was thrown into the Arno and watch was kept that no food should be conveyed to them.

> That day and the next
> We all were silent. Ah! obdurate earth!
> Why open'dst not upon us? When we came
> To the fourth day, then Gaddo at my feet
> Outstretched did fling him, crying, "Hast no help
> For me, my father!" There he died, and e'en
> Plainly as thou seest me, saw I the three
> Fall one by one 'twixt the fifth day and sixth:
> Whence I betook me, now grown blind, to grope
> Over them all, and for three days aloud
> Called on them who were dead. Then, fasting got
> The mastery of grief."

Chaucer, in *The Monke's Tale*, re-tells Dante's story of "Hugelyn of Pyse" in simple and touching language:

> His yonge sone, that three yeer was of age,
> Unto him seyde, Fader, why doe ye wepe?
> Whan wol the gayler bringen our potage,
> Is ther no morsel breed that ye doe kepe?
> I am so hungry that I may not slepe.

Ugolino is in Hell because of his treachery in surrendering some of the Pisan fortresses to the Florentines; it was in the year 1288 that he and his children met their awful fate, so that Dante was already arrived at man's estate when it happened, and is here describing a tragedy that he must himself have shuddered at when the news reached Florence.

The two poets have now come to the last Circle, the Giudecca, so-called because those who are there punished are traitors, fellow-sinners with the Arch-betrayer, Judas Iscariot. They have now reached the lowest depth of Hell, and here stands Lucifer, fixed in eternal ice—so fearful in aspect that Dante's powers of description fail him—

> How frozen and how faint I then became,
> Ask me not, reader! for I write it not,
> Since words would fail to tell thee of my state:
> I was not dead nor living.

Waving his bat-like wings, Lucifer champs wretched sinners in his jaws, while tears of blood gush from his eyes. Dante may well be appalled at such a sight, but Virgil tells him to take fast hold of his neck, and clinging together, they climb on to the shaggy side of the monster.

When they have gone half way on this terrible descent, Virgil turns—to Dante's amazement and dismay—and seems to go back, so that he fears he will have to make his journey up again through all the Circles of Hell. But Virgil, panting with the effort he has made, holds him fast and brings him out through an opening in the rock, whence, as he looks back, he sees to his astonishment that Hell is below them, and not above them, as he had imagined. He turns to his guide for an explanation, and Virgil tells him that when they turned themselves upon Lucifer's shaggy flank they passed the centre of the earth, and have come out under the southern hemisphere—covered, in the belief of that day, with the sea, and opposed to the hemisphere of land where the human race dwells, and upon the central summit of which the sinless Son of Man was put to death.

Their progress now will therefore be an ascent, and through this figure Dante teaches a great truth; lost

in the dark wood of error and confusion, he had sought to escape by his own efforts, and in his own strength to find the road to heaven; but the experiences through which Virgil has led him have made him realise that it is by the path of penitence alone that escape from error can be found. Now that he has learnt the evil of sin, he is "turned round," an allusion to the words of the Prophet Ezekiel—"When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive."

Repentance having now taken place, he will be led up and ever up until he attains pardon and peace, and when once Dante understands this he is eager to pursue his journey:

> heedless of repose
> We climbed, he first, I following his steps,
> Till on our view the beautiful lights of heaven
> Dawned through a circular opening in the cave;
> Thence issuing we again beheld the stars.

All the three sections of the *Divina Commedia—Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*—end with the same word, *stars*. "What! Can I not everywhere gaze upon the sun and the stars?" Dante had written, when the ignominious offer of pardon in return for self-abasement reached him from Florence. All through his exile the stars had accompanied him; with shining, friendly eyes, they had looked down upon his wanderings, and their light was to him the promise of a world where sorrow should be turned into joy, and pain into peace. It was as heralds of the future, as well as companions in the present, that the stars were dear to him, and therefore it is with them that he closes each division of his poem:

> Thence issuing we again beheld the stars.
> (*Inferno*, XXXIV., 139.)

Pure and made apt for mounting to the stars.
(*Purgatorio*, XXXIII., 145.)

The Love that moves the sun and all the stars.
(*Paradiso*, XXXIII., 145.)

Purgatorio.

It is now Easter Sunday, and Dante's heart rises high with hope and joy as he and Virgil once more emerge into the clear light of day, pure and bright as an "orient sapphire." They have not proceeded far when they see a venerable man who asks them how they have come there; Virgil recognises him as Cato, and tells him the story of Dante's journey, and Cato explains how Dante must be cleansed before he can climb the steep mountain of Purgatory: his face must be washed with dew—symbol of lowliness, since it is moisture that lies upon the ground, and he must be girded with a rope of rushes, symbol of humility, since they are ever bending as the water from the stream flows over them. Virgil carries out these instructions, and as he bathes Dante's face, the dew clears away the smoke and reek of Hell and restores it to its natural hue.

The sun is now rising, and in the far distance Dante sees a glow of light which, as it approaches, resolves itself into the likeness of an Angel coming over the water with a boat-load of spirits. He needs no oar or sail, for his glittering wings are spread to catch the breeze:

> Lo! how straight up to Heaven he holds them, reared,
> Winnowing the air with those eternal plumes,
> That not like mortal hairs fall off or change.
> As more and more towards us came, more bright
> Appeared the Bird of God, nor could the eye
> Endure his splendour near: I mine bent down.

He drove ashore in a small bark so swift
And light, that in its course no wave it drank.
The heavenly steersman at its prow was seen,
Visibly written "Blessèd" in his looks.
Within, a hundred spirits and more there sat.

The spirits sang hymns of joy as they came, and as soon as he had landed them the Angel returned over the water. One of the spirits proves to be Casella, a Florentine musician who was a friend of Dante's and had set some of his songs to music.* It is this Casella to whom Milton alludes in the *Sonnet to H. Lawes* on the airs that he had composed to some of Milton's songs:

Dante shall give Fame leave to set thee higher
Than his Casella, whom he wooed to sing,
Met in the milder shades of Purgatory.

Casella darts forward "with fond ardour" to greet his friend, and Dante begs him to sing that he may once again hear the sweet strains of his voice. Casella sings one of the Odes from the *Convivio*—one, no doubt, that he had set to music:

Love, reasoning of my Lady in my mind
With constant pleasure, oft of her will say
Things over which the intellect may stray;
His words make music of so sweet a kind
That the Soul hears and feels and cries, Ah! me,
That I want power to tell what thus I see!

So sweet was his singing that all stood spellbound, but Cato broke in, reproaching them for their delay in beginning the ascent of the Mountain of Purification. The spirits hasten away and Dante and Virgil follow them, but when they reach the Mountain they find it so steep that they cannot gain a foothold. Gazing upwards, they see a group of spirits above them on the crags and ask how they may reach them; the spirits reply by pointing out the path by

* Direct descendants of Casella are at the present time resident in England.

which they themselves have climbed, and one of them, Manfred, son of the Emperor Frederick the second, and at one time king of Sicily, talks with Dante of his excommunication, in spite of which his feet are set upon the Mountain of Purification. It is in such utterances as these, as well as in his scathing denunciation of some of the Popes, that Dante shows his independence of mind in matters ecclesiastical, as his severance of himself from party showed his independence in matters political. No human ban, he says—not even the curse of the Church—can doom a repentant soul:

> Yet by their curse we are not so destroyed
> But that the eternal Love may turn, while hope
> Shows yet one living leaf.

Although their feet are now upon the right path, the ascent is so toilsome that Dante can scarcely keep up with his guide, and pitying his weariness, Virgil suggests that they shall sit and rest awhile. Seated on a rock beside the way, Dante asks Virgil various questions, and when he sighs at the sight of the towering heights that have yet to be scaled, his guide tells him that it is only the first stages of their journey that will be so difficult—in other words, the more that resistance of evil is persisted in, the more it becomes a habit of the soul—another profound truth uttered by Dante in allegorical form.

After Dante has rested sufficiently, the two continue their climb, meeting on the way various people whom he had either known on earth or with whose names he was familiar, among them Sordello, the Mantuan poet, who greets his fellow-countryman, Virgil, with delight as soon as he is addressed:

> "Mantua." The shadow, in itself absorbed,
> Rose towards us from the place in which it stood,
> And cried, "Mantuan! I am thy countryman—
> Sordello!" Each the other then embraced.

[*Photograph A. T.*

A Tuscan Ox-Cart.

(Purg. xii., 1.)

At the sight of their affectionate fellowship, Dante's heart is moved, and he breaks out into a lament over the distractions of Italy:

> this gentle spirit,
> Even from the pleasant sound of his dear land
> Was prompt to greet a fellow-citizen
> With such glad cheer; while now thy living ones
> In thee abide not without war, and one
> Malicious gnaws another.

In the closing lines of the passage he addresses his own Florence in terms of praise that are but a bitter mockery:

> My Florence! thou mayst well remain unmoved
> At this digression, which affects not thee.

No part of Italy was in fact more affected by strife and faction than Dante's birthplace, and he ends by comparing her with a stricken wretch that can find no relief from pain:

> If thou rememberest well and canst see clear,
> Thou wilt perceive thyself like a sick wretch,
> Who finds no rest upon her down, but oft
> Shifting her side, short respite seeks from pain.

Sordello shows them a valley of flowers where they may spend the night; here they find other spirits, and the Evening Hymn ascends sweetly through the air, while two Angels descend to guard the entrance to the valley against any attack of the Serpent—a reminder that only those who have reached Paradise are free from temptation. Resting upon the grass, Dante sleeps, and in his sleep, Lucia, symbol of heavenly Grace, carries him up to the gate of Purgatory—showing that man cannot even repent without Divine help. Three steps lead up to the gate; the first is smooth and polished, like marble, so that he sees his form in it as in a mirror—showing that the first

step to repentance is that the sinner should see himself as he is; the second step is

> of hue more dark
> Than sablest grain, a rough and singed block,
> Cracked lengthwise and across;

the type of that contrition which burns and breaks the sinner's heart; the third

> seemed porphyry, that flamed
> Red as the life-blood spouting from a vein,

type of the blood of Christ shed upon the Cross for man's redemption.

Led by Virgil, Dante ascends the steps, and reaching the door, falls prostrate while he begs the Angel to admit him. The Angel lifts his sword and traces the letter *P* seven times on Dante's brow, and tells him that these marks—which indicate the *Peccati Capitali*, or Seven Principal Sins, must be purged away as he passes through Purgatory. He then takes the silver key of Experience, which is the test of the sinner's penitence, and the golden key of Absolution, and unlocks the gate.

As soon as the travellers have passed through, they once more begin to ascend, and Dante notices that the rocky wall is adorned with wonderful bas-reliefs; in one place he sees the Annunciation of the Virgin, in another Uzzah and the Ark, and while these teach lessons of humility he sees spirits creeping along under heavy burdens who are expiating the sin of pride. An Angel meets them at the exit of this first Ridge and points them up to the next, sweeping his wings across Dante's brow before he leaves them. Dante feels that some change has come over him and asks Virgil what it is;

> We climb the holy stairs
> And lighter to myself by far I seemed
> Than on the plain before; whence thus I spake:

"Say, Master, of what heavy thing have I
Been lightened, that scarce aught the sense of toil
Affects me journeying?" He in few replied:
"When sin's broad characters, that yet remain
Upon thy temples, though well nigh effaced,
Shall be, as one is, all clean razed out;
Then shall thy feet by heartiness of will
Be so o'ercome, they not alone shall feel
No sense of labour, but delight much more
Shall wait them, urged along their upward way."

Dante quickly lifts his hand to his forehead and finds

Six only of the letters, which his sword
Who bare the keys, had traced upon my brow.

Climbing the stairway, they reach the second Ridge, where they find those who are expiating the sin of Envy with their eyelids sewn up with wire, and here, with a beautiful touch, Dante shows the fine delicacy of his feeling, for he says that he halted and turned away, unwilling to gaze on those who could not look at him in return. Virgil leads him on, and he meets many whose names had long been familiar to him, so that the sun is setting by the time they have completed the circuit. A dazzling Angel meets them, almost blinding Dante with his beauty; he points them up to the next Ridge and removes another mark from Dante's brow; another truth is here shown allegorically, for Virgil tells him that these scars heal best when they give most pain—teaching that the most keenly felt repentance is the most beneficial to the soul.

As they pass round the third Ridge they find that sins of recklessness and haste are here expiated, and a dense mist rises round them which forces them to exercise that virtue of patience which is being taught to the spirits. Again an Angel appears, and with the effacement of the third letter from his brow, Dante is led up to the fourth

Ridge, where spirits are expiating the sin of sloth—Virgil explaining to him that sins such as sloth, indifference and apathy, are caused by want of love to God which quickens devotion, and want of love to man which quickens effort.

Another letter is expunged, and they mount to the fifth Ridge, where Avarice is expiated, and here he finds many who had held great place on earth prostrate on the ground and shedding bitter tears. Among them he beholds Pope Adrian the Fifth, who tells him that in life he had been covetous of all earthly things, but that having repented, he is here allowed to expiate his sin with penitence; the covetous, he says, are forced to grovel,

> e'en as our eyes
> Fastened below, nor e'er to loftier clime
> Were lifted; thus hath Justice levelled us
> Here on the earth.

Hugh Capet, too, is there, who on earth had thirsted for the kingly power, and many another whose sin had been black in the sight of God; yet all these are true penitents, and as the two poets pass on they hear a sound of sudden song—Glory to God in the Highest! and the mountain trembles beneath their feet. Their wonder is excited, and seeing a spirit before them on the path, they overtake him and question him as to what these manifestations may mean. The spirit replies that when any soul has completed its purification and is ready to be received into Paradise, a strain of praise goes up from every lip till the Mountain itself is shaken as if with joy. Five hundred years, he adds, has he lain in punishment, but now he is free to leave Purgatory and go up to the realms of the Blessed. He then discloses himself as Statius, the Roman poet, and says that he was led to the knowledge of Christ by the writings of Virgil, whom he would fain thank for the light that he showed him, even while he

realises that Virgil himself was left in darkness. Dante then tells him that Virgil stands before him, and Statius pours out his gratitude to the poet who had inspired his intellect and the unconsciously Christian teacher who had enlightened his eyes:

> Thou didst, as one
> Who, journeying through the darkness, bears a light
> Behind, that profits not himself, but makes
> His followers wise, when thou exclaimedst: "Lo!
> A renovated world; Justice returned,
> Times of primeval innocence restored,
> And a new race descended from above!"
> Poet and Christian both to thee I owed.

In company with Statius, Virgil and Dante then mount to the sixth Ridge where sins of Gluttony and Self-indulgence are expiated. An Angel appears and warns them that they will have to pass through the wall of living fire that they see before them. This is the Angel of Temperance, who takes another mark from Dante's forehead:

> As when, to harbinger the dawn, springs up
> On freshened wing the air of May, and breathes
> Of fragrance, all impregned with herb and flowers;
> E'en such a wind I felt upon my front
> Blow gently, and the moving of a wing
> Perceived, that moving, shed ambrosial smell;
> And then a voice: "Blessed are they, whom grace
> Doth so illumine, that appetite in them
> Exhaleth no inordinate desire,
> Still hungering as the rule of temperance wills.

They are now close to the fire, and Dante shrinks back when he sees the fury of its flames, but another Angel meets them, singing as he approaches, "Blessed are the pure in heart," and Virgil encourages his faltering charge

with the reminder that if he would see Beatrice he must press on dauntlessly:

> Into the fire before me then he walked;
> And Statius, who erewhile no little space
> Had parted us, he prayed to come behind.
> I would have cast me into molten glass
> To cool me, when I entered; so intense
> Raged the conflagrant mass. The sire beloved
> To comfort me, as he proceeded, still
> Of Beatrice talked. "Her eyes," he said,
> "E'en now I seem to view." From the other side
> A voice, that sang, did guide us; and the voice
> Following, with heedful ear, we issued forth,
> There, where the path led upward. "Come," we heard,
> "Come, blessed of my Father!" Such the sounds
> That hailed us from within a light, which shone
> So radiant, I could not endure the view.

Night is now falling, and they lie down underneath an overhanging rock, pressed close to the mountain side, and rest their weary limbs till day once more dawns. They then mount the last stairway, and Virgil tells him that he can accompany him no further, but must return to his appointed place. It will not be long, he says, before Beatrice appears, but in the meantime Dante will have no need of guidance, for he has now been purged from all the seven letters, and is in the state of innocence that our first parents possessed before the Fall, so that he may now safely be his own guide:

> Expect no more
> Sanction of warning voice or sign from me,
> Free of thine own arbitrement to choose,
> Discreet, judicious. To distrust thy sense
> Were henceforth error. I invest thee then
> With crown and mitre, sovereign o'er thyself.

They part, and Dante wanders on through the trees till beside a stream he meets a lady—later on called

Matilda—who is generally taken as a type of the active life of the Church—teaching that the soul when once purged of its guilt must give itself to service for humanity. Matilda tells him that he must drink of the waters of Lethe, so that the remembrance of his sins may be blotted out of his mind. Among the ancients, the river of Lethe was said to flow through the world of spirits, so that the dead might drink of it and forget their earthly deeds. Dante takes this idea and Christianises it, linking the fabled river with the atoning stream of Christ's blood, which blots out not only sin, but the remembrance of sin. But Lethe is not enough, it is only evil that is to be forgotten, and having drunk of it, he must then drink of Eunoe, the blessed stream, which will recall to his mind all the good that he has wrought in the past.

As Dante and Matilda walk on, one on each side of the river, a wonderful vision appears before him, a vision of Saints and Angels, of solemn Seers and holy Apostles, clad in white robes and singing as they come. This vision is a foretaste of the glories of Paradise, and as the procession passes, Dante sees a cloud of flowers showering down from Heaven, and in among them is the blessed Beatrice herself. The supreme and longed-for moment has come, yet it is not joy that he feels, but fear; even as his heart had trembled within him when he met her in the streets of Florence, so now he feels himself all unworthy to greet her, and turns to see if Virgil is not still near him, as a child turns for refuge to its mother. But Virgil has gone, his task is over; and in spite of the rapture of beholding Beatrice, Dante cannot refrain from weeping at the thought that no penitence can release him from Limbo.

But here there occurs one of those exquisite touches

which show with what tenderness Dante's seeming severity was softened. The singing Angels who surround the car in which Beatrice is seated, are chanting sacred words, "Come with me, my Spouse from Lebanon," and "Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord," but when to these they add *Manibus o date lilia plenis*, it is not from the Song of Solomon, nor from the Holy Gospels, that they choose their song; it is from Virgil's *Æneid*:

> O give me lilies! lilies to fill my hands! (Bk. VI., 833).

and it is with the echo of his own words in his ears—words sung by the Angels of heaven—that Virgil goes back to Limbo's shades of sadness, but shades of sadness surely lit by hope.

But sorrow for Virgil's fate is soon to be changed into sorrow for his own. His rapture of joy at beholding Beatrice again is turned into dread, for instead of welcoming him, she reproaches him sternly. In the days of the *Vita Nuova*, she says, he gave promise of every good grace, but when her presence was removed from him, he fell into unworthy courses and belied the hopes that he had raised in her breast. The meaning of this passage has been much disputed, some writers maintaining that Dante's "fall" was his unfaithfulness to Beatrice in marrying Gemma; others that it was his neglect of philosophy and his plunge into party politics; others again, that he refers to evil ways of life which stained his youth. The first explanation seems rather a forced one; either of the other two may be correct, for Dante was a man and not a superhuman being, and he was therefore a partaker of the faults and frailties of the human race. But in whatever sense we may interpret the passage, its teaching is clear and unmistakable—the realisation and confession

of sin must precede its pardon, the waters of Lethe cannot flow over the tortured memory until the pain of remorse has been fully felt. Therefore it is that Beatrice, standing lofty and withdrawn, recounts all his wanderings from the right way, until at length he can bear no more, and, dazzled by the splendour that shines in her face, he sinks to the ground:

> In loveliness she seemed as much
> Her former self surpassing, as on earth
> All others she surpassed. Remorseful goads
> Shot sudden through me. Each thing else, the more
> Was loathsome. On my heart so keenly smote
> The bitter consciousness, that on the ground
> O'erpowered I fell.

But as he lies there, lost in shame and grief, Matilda stoops down and draws him through the water until he is cleansed and freed, not only from sin, but from the remembrance of sin.

Then through the air come floating the blessed words of purification, *Tu Asperges me*, and drawing him up the bank, Matilda leads him back to Beatrice, while songs of joy resound through the air, and with rapture Dante finds that he is able now to gaze upon his Lady, to gaze and gaze, and again to gaze that his eyes may be satisfied with beauty after their ten years thirst for her face.

The company of the Blessed, meanwhile, are exulting over the pardoned sinner, singing and dancing with joy. The idea of dancing Angels may seem somewhat irreverent to us, but it was a familiar one to mediæval minds. Fra Angelico loved to depict such scenes, and Jacopo Benedetti —generally known as Jacopone da Todi, from the place of his birth, has given the title of *Ballo di Angeli* to one of his most charming lyrics:

Dance they in a ring in Heaven,
Where the love divine abideth,
In that ring dance all the blessed,
Go they all before the Bridegroom.

All the blessed in that garden,
Which is all aglow with love,
In that ring dance all the angels,
Dancing all of them for love.

Clad are they in coloured raiment,
White and red and variegated,
Crowned they are with wreaths of flowers,
Like to lovers are they all.*

The procession moves on, and at length Beatrice seats herself at the foot of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and strange visions are shown to Dante of perils that shall befall the Church and of her fatal attempt to seize the Temporal Power; he looks and wonders, and after this is led on to the place where Lethe and Eunoe divide and is allowed to drink from the stream of Blessing which causes joy unspeakable to flow through his whole being:

I returned
From the most holy wave, regenerate,
E'en as new plants renewed with foliage new,
Pure and made apt for mounting to the stars.

Paradiso.

His glory, by whose might all things are moved,
Pierces the Universe, and in one part
Sheds more resplendence, elsewhere less. In Heaven
That largeliest of His light partakes, was I,
Witness of things, which, to relate again,
Surpasseth power of him who comes from thence.

It is with these words that Dante begins the *Paradiso*; having learnt the deadly nature of sin he has repented;

* Translated by L. Douglas.

having repented, he has been purified; and now, being made "pure in heart," he is to "see God" as He is revealed to the Blessed in Paradise before they enter upon the fuller life of Heaven. The keynote of this final section of the poem is struck in the opening lines; for here we have no detailed description of material objects, such as we find in the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*; the joys of Paradise are expresed in terms of light and music—light of "crystal clearness," "refulgent rays of splendour," "glory transcendent and ineffable," and music "so unearthly sweet" that the soul trembles as it floats through the listening air.

And yet, in spite of all this beauty, of all this radiance, there are many readers who are repelled by the *Paradiso*, and consider it inferior to the other two sections of the poem. The reason of this is not far to seek: Beatrice is here the incarnation of Divine Wisdom; and since she is now to be Dante's guide in place of Virgil, he takes advantage of her presence to question her concerning things that are too deep for man's comprehension. It is these long disquisitions that are so often found wearisome, nor is this to be wondered at—Dante's difficulties with regard to such subjects as Free Will and Predestination, or his perplexities concerning the composition of the elements and the connection between the soul of a man and the particular Planet under whose influence he was born, are not of any great interest now, and if we concentrate our attention too much upon them we shall find ourselves thinking of St. Peter and of Thomas Aquinas as wordy and obscure theologians, and of Beatrice as a dogmatic and dictatorial female Professor, resolving Dante's doubts with condescending pity.

But these lengthy disquisitions are not the whole of the *Paradiso*; it shimmers with light, it vibrates with music,

and the less time that is spent upon the argumentative passages the more will its beauties grow upon the mind. That Dante himself was aware of its difficulties is shown by the lines with which he begins the second Canto:

> All ye, who in small bark have following sail'd,
> Eager to listen, on the adventurous track
> Of my proud keel, that singing cuts her way,
> Backward return with speed, and your own shores
> Revisit; nor put out to open sea,
> Where losing me, perchance ye may remain
> Bewildered in deep maze.

It may be noted in passing how difficult it is for those who do not read Dante's poems in the original to form a just idea of him: the expression "proud keel" gives the impression that he held his own gifts and achievements in very high esteem, but "proud" is an interpolation of Cary's, for which, *mio legno*—my ship—supplies no justification.

It is in no proud spirit, but humbly as a little child, that he sets out on his voyage through the untracked realms of Paradise; Divine strength must inspire him, or he will prove unequal to the task; Beatrice must lead him, for in himself he has no power to behold the sacred glories that are to be revealed to him:

> Beatrice heavenward gazed, and I on her.

This line, which sums up the whole of Dante's relation to the Lady of his love, is the direct antithesis of that line in *Paradise Lost* in which Milton sums up the whole of his superior attitude towards womanhood:

> He for God only, she for God in him.

It is of the plan of the Universe that Dante first questions his guide, and the explanation given to him by

Beatrice strictly follows the order of the Spheres as laid down by Ptolemy: The Earth, the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, the Crystalline, or, Primum Mobile, and the Empyrean.

Dante cannot at first understand why it is that the spirits are placed in spheres of differing glory, but meeting Piccarda, the sister of Forese Donati, she tells him that all are alike content, for each spirit is given as much glory as it is capable of receiving, and is therefore fully satisfied:

His will is our Peace;

in these words, which Dante puts into her mouth, he sums up the faith on which he rests his soul—where God is, there is Heaven, and without submission to His will is nothing but sorrow and confusion of face.

As they pass upward, Dante sees many of the most renowned sons of earth—the Emperor Justinian; Charles Martel, son of the king of Naples, whom Dante had met in Florence, and whose death in the flower of his brilliant promise he had deeply mourned; Thomas Aquinas, and others, with all of whom he holds converse. As they pass through the Sphere of Mars, they see a wondrous vision of the spirits of those who have died fighting in God's cause; radiant with glory, they are grouped in the form of a Cross, and while he gazes upon it the spirits that compose it break out into song:

> As the chime
> Of minstrel music, dulcimer, and harp
> With many strings, a pleasant dinning makes
> To him, who heareth not distinct the note;
> So from the lights which there appeared to me,
> Gathered along the Cross a melody,
> That, indistinctly heard, with ravishment
> Possessed me. Yet I marked it was a hymn
> Of lofty praises; for there came to me

"Arise!" and "Conquer!" as to one who hears
And comprehends not. Me such ecstasy
O'ercame, that never, till that hour, was thing
That held me in so sweet imprisonment.

From among the lights that form the Cross a star glides down, and Dante finds that it is the spirit of his great ancestor, Cacciaguida, with whom he talks of the state of Florence and hears his own future foretold.

They then ascend to the Sphere of Jupiter, where he finds David, Hezekiah, Charlemagne, Godfrey of Bouillon and other great and wise leaders of men; these form themselves into the shape of an Eagle, the symbol of Justice:

Before my sight appeared, with open wings
The beauteous image; in fruition sweet
Gladdening the thronging spirits. Each did seem
A little ruby, whereon so intense
The sunbeam glowed, that to mine eyes it came
In clear refraction.

Of the spirits that make up the Eagle he asks many questions as to the workings of God's justice, till Beatrice draws him up to the Seventh Sphere, that of Saturn, where they see the spirits of those who have found joy on earth in the contemplation of the Divine goodness. These spirits are clad in light, and as Dante watches the flashing of their splendour while they move and pass upon the lofty stairway—

In colour like to sun-illumined gold,

he compares them to rooks at the dawn of day—

As the rooks, at dawn of day,
Bestirring them to dry their feathers chill,
Some speed their way afield; and homeward some
Returning, cross their flight; while some abide,

And wheel around their airy lodge; so seemed
That glitterance, wafted on alternate wing,
As upon certain stair it came, and clashed
Its shining.

Dante's love of birds has been often noticed. Living at a time when Nature was scarcely deemed worthy of recognition either by artists or poets, he had an intense appreciation of the beauty of trees and flowers, of running water, of quivering light, of dew-starred grass, and a love for birds that St. Francis himself can hardly have surpassed. The mother dove, hovering over her nest; the parent birds toiling to fill the gaping beaks of their nestlings; the "feathered choristers that hail the morning hours with joy," the lark, singing and soaring till it drops to earth exhausted with ecstasy—all these and many more are noted by him in terms that show his keen observation of their ways.

Even in the dread shades of Hell and on the toilsome slopes of Purgatory, his love of beauty breaks out in a thousand touches; and now that Paradise is reached and all around him breathes celestial glory, he gives this love full liberty, so that it irradiates the whole scene and enlivens the somewhat long discourses with which Beatrice answers his doubts and difficulties.

What can be more tender than the simile with which he describes Beatrice at the entrance to the eighth Sphere watching eagerly for the revelation of the Triumph of the Blessed:

E'en as the bird, who midst the leafy bower
Has, in her nest, sat darkling through the night,
With her sweet brood; impatient to descry
Their wishèd looks, and to bring home their food,
In the fond quest unconscious of her toil:
She, of the time prevenient, on the spray,

That overhangs their couch, with wakeful gaze
Expects the sun; nor ever, till the dawn,
Removeth from the east her eager ken;
So stood my Lady.

The light burns brighter and brighter, radiant colours flash through the air, and ever as the glory grows the beauty of Beatrice shines more and more clearly upon Dante's ravished sight; but it is not of her that he ought now to think, and in warning accents she bids him turn his eyes from her to gaze upon Christ and His Saints:

"Why doth my face," said Beatrice, "thus
Enamour thee, as that thou dost not turn
Unto the beautiful garden, blossoming
Beneath the rays of Christ? Here is the Rose
Wherein the Word Divine was made incarnate;
And here the lilies, by whose odour known
The way of life was followed." Prompt I heard
Her bidding, and encountered once again
The strife of aching vision. As, erewhile,
Through glance of sunlight, streamed through broken cloud,
Mine eyes a flower-besprinkled mead have seen;
Though veiled themselves in shade: so saw I there
Legions of splendours, on whom burning rays
Shed lightnings from above.

In one of these glorified spirits, Dante recognises St. Peter, who questions him as to his faith, and declares himself well pleased with his answers. Having received the benediction of St. Peter, Dante is confronted by St. James, who questions him as to his hope, and St. John, who asks him of his love to God and his love to man. He is now fit to rise to a higher Sphere, and a song of exultation breaks out from the celestial host:

To Father, Son and Holy Ghost, began
That Gloria, chanted by all Paradise,
And I was drunk with joy, so sweet it ran.

It was as though a smile did meet my eyes
From all creation, so that joy's excess
Through sight and hearing did my mind surprise;
O bliss! O joy! no mortal may express!
O life filled full with love and peace, good store!
O riches free from selfish eagerness!*

Beatrice bids him look back along the dark and toilsome way that he has come, and he casts his eyes downward and sees the winding path far below him. Ten days have now passed since he began his journey; the close of the Easter Octave has come, and on Close, or Low, Sunday, the climax of his wonderful experience is approaching. With heart beating high with expectation, he follows Beatrice into the Empyrean and beholds a transcendent vision of glory. In the form of a glowing and fragrant rose, pure as crystal, throbbing with living light, the Saints surround the central figure of Christ like the clustering leaves of a flower, while up and down upon the Mystic Rose, fluttering over it with wings of gold, go the Angels

like a troop of bees
Amid the vernal sweets alighting now,
Now, clustering, where their fragrant labour glows,
Flew downward to the mighty Flower, or rose
From the redundant petals, streaming back
Unto the steadfast dwelling of their joy.
Faces had they of flame, and wings of gold;
The rest was whiter than the driven snow.

As he gazes entranced upon the glorious sight, he finds St. Bernard beside him, sent by Beatrice, who has herself gone up to take her place again among the Blessed, near to the central Sun. St. Bernard points her out to Dante, and looking on her transfigured and transcendent beauty

* Translated by Dean Plumptre.

he breaks out into one final burst of praise, one last glowing tribute:

> O Lady! thou in whom my hopes have rest;
> Who, for my safety, hast not scorned, in hell
> To leave the traces of thy footsteps marked;
> For all mine eyes have seen, I to thy power
> And goodness, virtue owe and grace. From slave
> Thou hast to freedom brought me, and no means
> For my deliverance apt hast left untried.
> Thy liberal bounty still towards me keep,
> That, when my spirit which thou madest whole,
> Is loosened from this body, it may find
> Favour with thee!

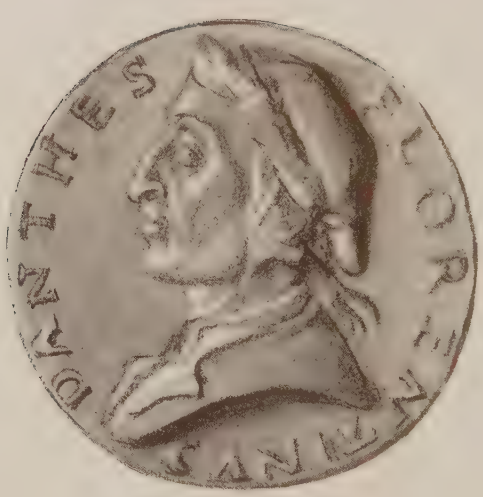
But the *Divina Commedia* does not end with Beatrice. Deep and faithful as Dante's love is for her, he loves her most because she lifts him out of himself and turns his gaze continually upward; it is with the Divine Glory that the Vision is to close, and St. Bernard tells him it is Christ alone, the God-Man, one with His Father, yet partaking of the nature of His human mother, who alone can satisfy him. Then follows the beautiful hymn to the Virgin:

> O Virgin Mother, daughter of thy Son,

which Chaucer translated and used as a Prologue to his *Seconde Nonnes Tale*:

> Thou mayde and mooder, doghter of thy sone,
> Thou welle of mercy, sinful soules cure,
> In whom that god, for bountee, chees to wone,
> Thou humble, and heigh over every creature,
> Thou noblesdest so ferforth our nature
> That no desdeyn the maker hadde of kinde,
> His sone in blode and flesh to clothe and winde.

As the hymn ends, Dante looks up, but there are no words in which he may tell that which he saw, tongue



Drawing by Ascanio Tealdi

PORTRAIT OF DANTE, early 14th century, from a medal in the Bargello.

REVERSE OF THE MEDAL. Dante looking at himself with Beatrice on the summit of the Mount of Purgatory: to the left is the Mouth of Hell.

cannot speak, heart cannot conceive, the splendour and radiance of the Divine Majesty—all he can do is to pray that some little particle may be revealed by him so that Mankind may not be wholly ignorant of the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him:

> As one, who from a dream awakened, straight,
> All he hath seen forgets; yet still retains
> Impression of the feeling in his dream;
> E'en such am I; for all the vision dies,
> As t'were away; and yet the sense of sweet,
> That sprang from it, still trickles in my heart.
> O eternal Beam!
> Yield me again some little particle
> Of what Thou then appearedst; give my tongue
> Power, but to leave one sparkle of Thy glory,
> Unto the race to come, that shall not lose
> Thy triumph wholly, if Thou waken aught
> Of memory in me, and endure to hear
> The record sound in this unequal strain.

With so wondering a gaze he stood transfixed that he could not tell whether moments or ages were passing by; light everlasting, light that caught up every object into its glowing splendour, poured into his soul, and as its rays enveloped him, he knew that this living radiance was the love of God—that Love which binds up, as it were, the trials, the griefs, and the manifold experiences of the world, into one volume of divine grace and mercy—that Love which impels each individual soul even as it "moves the sun in Heaven and all the stars."

In this magnificent strain—where the most lofty imagination is mingled with the purest devotion—the poem ends.

Of the last thirteen Cantos of the *Paradiso*, Boccaccio relates a strange story. Dante, he says, had had no

pre-vision that he was about to die, and since he had not shown these Cantos to anyone, nor said anything concerning them, it was thought that he had left his great poem unfinished. His children and his friends sought in every place for many months, but no success rewarded their efforts, and at last they abandoned all hope in the matter. His two sons, Jacopo and Pietro, being both poets, resolved to finish the work themselves in the best fashion that they could, but at the end of eight months after Dante's death, Jacopo went to Piero Giardino, a close friend of his father's, and told him that in the night he had seen a vision—that Dante had appeared to him, clad in white, with light shining from his face, and that he led him to the chamber in which he had been used to work and showed him a recess in the wall that was hidden by some hangings and said to him, "Here is that which ye so long have sought." Giardino at once accompanied him to the place, and though no one had had any suspicion that such a recess existed, there it was, in very truth, behind the hangings, and in it lay the lost Cantos.

How much of fact there is in this story we cannot tell; it may have been that in sleep some latent memory was stirred in Jacopo's brain, or that some dream which put him on the track of the discovery was afterwards magnified by him into a vision; but this much is certain, that the date when Dante completed the *Paradiso* is not recorded, and that the last Cantos were not made known during his lifetime. Boccaccio is no doubt correct in stating that death came upon him unawares, for his last illness was a short one, and it was brought about, not by any constitutional weakness, but from an accidental cause.

Among other proofs of the trust that he reposed in Dante, Guido Novello had several times employed him as an

ambassador, and in the summer of 1321, he was deputed to plead the cause of Ravenna before the Doge of Venice. A dispute at sea had ended in an attack by a Ravennese crew upon a Venetian ship, and since the captain and many of the men were killed, the Venetian Government declared war upon Ravenna, and called upon Rimini, Faenza and other cities, to join them in taking revenge. Immediate steps were necessary if Ravenna was not to be destroyed, and Guido requested Dante to put his wisdom, his learning and his eloquence, at the service of the State that sheltered him. A record in the Venetian Archives gives the date of August 11, 1321, for the rupture of relations between Venice and Ravenna, while a document of October 20 shows that between these two dates an embassy from Guido Novello had been received by the Doge and had returned to Ravenna to take back a report and to ask further instructions.

The letter purporting to be written by Dante from Venice is generally considered to be a forgery, but from these two documents it is clear that his mission had been so far successful as to re-establish negotiations, and it was these negotiations that led to the treaty which was signed after his death. The land route from Venice to Ravenna was shorter than the sea voyage along the coast, and since time was of the utmost importance, Dante and his companions crossed by boat to the mainland and returned through the marshy districts, specially unhealthy at that time of the year.

His embassy to Rome had cost him his rights as a citizen, his embassy to Venice was to cost him his life. Fever seized upon him as he crossed the malarious marshlands; and though he lived to reach Ravenna, his strength failed so rapidly that he died on the 14th of September. Boccaccio describes the closing scene:

Having humbly and reverently received the Sacraments of the Church according to the Christian religion, and having expressed to God deep repentance for all the sins he had committed, on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, in the month of September in this year of Christ, 1321, to the intense grief of Guido and of all the citizens of Ravenna, he yielded up his weary spirit to his Creator, the which, I doubt not, was received in the arms of his most noble Beatrice, with whom, in the sight of Him who is the highest good, having left behind him the miseries of this present life, he now lives most blissfully in that life to the felicity of which we believe there is no end.

"He was buried with much honour," says Villani, "as a poet and a great philosopher"; and Boccaccio relates that Count Guido ordered the body to be placed upon a bier," adorned with a poet's ornaments," and that it was carried by bearers chosen from among the most renowned citizens of Ravenna and followed by mourning multitudes to the Convent of the Minor Friars, where it was placed in a stone sarcophagus. After this the mourners returned to Dante's house, and the Count made a long eulogy of his departed friend, praising his learning and his virtue and promising to erect a noble monument to his memory. This promise he would no doubt have fulfilled, but in the next year his power was overthrown, and he left Ravenna, never to return.

The tomb in which Dante's remains were placed was in the chapel of Braccioforte in the church of San Francesco. This chapel took its name from a curious legend: a man who was lending money to a friend, it is said, took him into the chapel, and laying the gold before the Figure on the Crucifix above the altar said: "Oh! Lord God Omnipotent, be Thou my surety for this act." Having secured the loan, the borrower went off to the East, and since nothing was heard of him, the lender at last

went to the chapel and called upon the Figure to bring him back "by the might of the strong arm (*braccio forte*) of God," and by means which no man could have devised, the borrower was brought back and the lender was able to enforce the return of his money.

The tomb evidently fell into decay before the year 1378, for a record dated in that year mentions two inscriptions that are said to have been placed upon it when "it was restored"; the one that is generally attributed to Bernardus de Canatro, is still to be seen, and has been translated as follows:

> The rights of Monarchy, the Heavens, the stream of Fire, the Pit,
> In vision keen, I sang, as far as to the Fates seemed fit;
> But since my soul, an alien here, hath flown to nobler wars,
> And happier now, hath gone to meet its Maker 'mid the stars,
> Here am I, Dante, shut, exiled from th' ancestral shore,
> Whom Florence, the least loving mother bore.

Florence, least loving mother, would only too gladly have welcomed back the ashes of the son whom she had cast out, but, though application was made on several different occasions, the people of Ravenna refused to listen—with them the poet had sought refuge in life, with them he should lie in the repose of death. It was in 1483 that Cardinal Bembo visited Ravenna and ordered the bas-relief—which still adorns the tomb—to be carved by Lombardi, the celebrated sculptor, and at that time no doubt the poet's remains were still there. But in 1519, when Leo the Tenth was Pope, Michelangelo, with other distinguished Florentines, besought him to bring home the exile with all honour, and received a command from him to send delegates to Ravenna for that purpose. To prevent the opening of the tomb was seemingly beyond the power of the authorities, but disappointment awaited the Florentines, for the tomb was empty, and the

quaintly worded announcement was made to Pope Leo, that "the deputies from the *Accademia* having visited the tomb, they found Dante neither in soul nor yet in body; and it being believed that he had in his lifetime, in body as well as in spirit, made the journey through the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, so in death it must now be assumed that in body as well as in spirit, in either one or other of those realms he has been received and welcomed."

In 1658 the portico that had joined the tomb of Dante to the Braccioforte chapel was taken away and the tomb was altered so as to make the opening towards the piazza, as we see it now. In 1760 it was again restored; but though it was once more opened and found to be empty of all but a fragment or two of bone and a few withered laurel leaves, the Florentines apparently did not know this, for they again demanded the remains in 1865 when the Sixth Centenary of the poet's birth was about to be celebrated. To this the authorities of Ravenna made the dignified reply that as all the cities of Italy were now united under one rule, Dante could no longer be considered an exile. This refusal, it was hoped, would end the matter.

But though no further request was made by Florence, a strange discovery was in store—a discovery that set Ravenna aflame with excitement. A ceremony in connection with the Sixth Centenary of the birth had been arranged, and during the course of some alterations in the Braccioforte chapel, part of the wall was pulled down and a wooden chest came to light, inscribed with the words:

Dantis ossa, a me
Fra Antonio Santi,
hic posita, anno 1677,
Die 18, Oct.

The eagerness with which it was opened may be imagined, and when it was found to contain human bones, the tomb was examined, with the result that the few fragments that were there when Leo the Tenth's delegates made their report were seen to fit accurately into the skeleton when it was pieced together. The measurements of the skull proved to be exactly the same as those of the death mask preserved in Florence, and the length of the jaw and nasal bones were what would have been expected from the jaw and nose of the portraits. The generally accepted explanation of the mystery is that on one of the early occasions on which Florence tried to recover the remains they were removed from the tomb and secretly buried, and that Antonio Santi—Chancellor of the Convent in 1677—made a later verification and recorded it upon the chest. The suggestion several times put forward was that the bones had been burnt, but the discovery of 1865 showed that the authorities knew where they were, but made no record of the place for fear it should come to the ears of the Florentines, and thus the matter was gradually forgotten.

Having found the bones, the people of Ravenna felt that they could not do enough in their honour, and on the 20th of June they were placed in a crystal coffin, ornamented with gilding, and taken to the Chapel of Braccioforte with the most solemn ceremonies. Delegates from Florence were present, and one of the inscriptions on the dais upon which the coffin rested bore the words: "Not Florence, but the fury of party condemned him to perpetual exile" (*Non Firenze, ma la ira furica di parte, dannava a perpetuo esilio*).

On the 26th of June the bones were once more placed in the tomb, and Padre Giuliani, one of the Florentine delegates, delivered an oration in which he said that it

must be a miracle that had revealed them at that particular moment—"to justify the poet's prophetic declaration of the unity and prosperity of Italy."

For it was as a prophet, and not only as a poet, that Dante was hailed at the celebration of the Sixth Centenary of his birth; Mazzini, himself an exile, had years before recognised in the creator of a national language the forerunner of national unity, and in his recognition the whole of Italy joined in May, 1865.

"In this Sixth Centenary of Dante," ran the official declaration, "Italy will celebrate the birth not only of the greatest Christian poet, but also the fruitful idea of the Italian *Risorgimento* by him first presented and proclaimed, sustained and defended," while the preface of the Festival Guidebook concluded with the words: "If the work of national regeneration be not yet complete, we behold, at least, an earnest of its approaching and happy consummation in this reunion of Italy in one thought, one sentiment and one most holy name, the name of the precursor of the unity and freedom of Italy—Dante Alighieri."

How fully these words were justified is shown by the fact that this was the first public occasion in which all the Provinces of United Italy had been represented, and that with them were associated delegates, not only from Rome and Venice—so soon to be included in the kingdom—but from Trieste and Istria, that *Italia Irredenta*, which was not to be redeemed until the eve of the Sixth Centenary celebrations of the poet's death in 1921. In the speech made at the opening of the festival by the Gonfaloniere of Florence, Count Cambray-Digny, great stress was laid on the fact that Dante had been the first Italian writer to use the vernacular, and he was acclaimed as the giver

of a common tongue to disunited Italy, a boon which had brought with it the gift of a common nationality—the Count concluding with the emphatic words: "Let the whole world know that this festival is none other than the solemn confirmation of the compact which unites together the scattered members of the ancient mother of modern civilisation."

This tribute to Dante's share in the *Risorgimento* was no more than the truth, even though a Constitutional Monarchy such as that which has made Italy one kingdom instead of a group of rival States, bears little resemblance to his dream of a universal and despotic Empire; for though his scheme was not adopted, his hope has been fulfilled and his desire accomplished. It was not because he loved despotism for its own sake that he advocated it; but because he considered it to be the only way of ending the internal strifes of his distracted country. Justice was his real desire—the goal of his efforts and ambitions—as it was the desire and the goal of Plato ages before his day, and since, like ourselves, the Italians have found that justice is best realised in a crowned democracy, Dante would have been the first to agree to the inscription engraved upon the sword presented to King Victor Emmanuel at the festival of 1865—*Dante, al primo Re d'Italia.*

The dream of a universal despotism has been revived in our own day, with results that we all know. A German commentator on Dante, Dr. Karl Witte, makes some statements in a book published about forty years ago, that read strangely enough to-day: "Among the Italians," he says, "there is unlimited confidence in the lasting power of United Germany, and a really romantic reverence for our grey-headed Emperor-hero, whom they love to call Barbabianca, and wherever the knightly figure of

this heir to Germany's empire has been seen on the other side of the Alps, he has won all hearts. The poet's dream of a united Italy is realised; Henry the Seventh did not indeed bring the Guelfs to recognise the Empire, but Kaiser Wilhelm, the heir of the Luxemburgher's crown, has won Venice for Victor Emmanuel at Sadowa, and opened the doors of the Quirinal for him at Sedan."

This is a fairly broad hint, and when he goes on to explain that Dante's idea of a United Italy was not one kingdom, but a collection of separate States, "guarded and guided by a supreme power," it is evident that Wilhelm Barbabianca was to succeed to the Overlordship of Frederick Barbarossa.

But Italy was not doomed to be trodden under foot by a German despot. Petrarch, in his magnificent poem on the woes of his country—a poem which has ever been considered to be one of the greatest treasures of Italian literature—speaks of the dangers from without as well as of the troubles within and cries:

> *Ben provvide natura al nostro stato*
> *Quando de l'Alpi schermo*
> *Pose fra noi, e la Tedesca rabbia!*
> (Nature provided well for this our land
> When the stern bulwark of the Alps she reared
> Between us and the German's rage to stand.)

That bulwark has not proved weaker to-day than it did in the past.

The conflicts of the *Risorgimento* had not yet died away when the festival of the Sixth Centenary of Dante's birth was held, and the land was still seething with unrest; but though there were some who feared that it was too soon to hold such a celebration, they proved to be wrong, for the festival did more to heal wounds and bind together discordant elements than any other scheme that could

have been devised: Venetians, Sardinians, Neapolitans, Romans, Milanese, could not cherish envy and jealousy of one another when all alike joined in hailing Dante in his own words to Beatrice—

O gloria della gente umana!

or when side by side they gazed upon the inscription that had been placed upon the façade of the Portinari palace—*O voi che per la via d'amore passate, volgete uno sguardo alle mura ove nacque nel Aprile del* 1266, *Beatrice Portinari, prima e purissima fiamma che accese il genio del divino poeta, Dante Alighieri* (O ye who pass by the way of love, cast a glance at the walls where in April, 1266, Beatrice Portinari was born, first and purest flame that kindled the genius of the divine poet, Dante Alighieri).

But in this sixth century after Dante's death, the echoes of a still fiercer conflict ring in every ear. Not the freedom of an individual country, but of the whole civilised world, hung there in the balance, and Italy, like the rest of the nations, has been shaken to its very core; yet none of those who love her can doubt that the celebrations of Dante's death will have as healing and uniting an influence as those of his birth; and it is a striking coincidence that the later festival has, like the former, been signalised by a discovery.

The announcement that a chest had been found in Ravenna containing Dante's bones thrilled every lover of the poet in the summer of 1865, and in the summer of 1920, during some preparations in the church of San Francesco, adjoining the tomb, a fresco was found above the spot where the first grave was made. In dress and pose the figure resembles that in the bas-relief over the tomb; Dante is draped in a flowing cloak, his

eyes are downcast, his chin in his hand; and Professor Gerola, Superintendent of National Monuments in Italy, has pronounced the portrait to be that of the poet, executed probably in the latter half of the fourteenth century.

In all the representations of Dante, whether portraits, busts or death-masks, that have come down to us, there is not only a similarity of feature, but a lofty expression which reveals the majesty of his nature. Tennyson and Fitzgerald, we are told, stood one day before a shop window in which busts of Dante and Goethe were displayed among those of other great men. "What is it in Dante's face that we miss in Goethe's?" asked Fitzgerald, and Tennyson flashed out the answer, "The Divine."

That Dante was free from faults, no one would dream of affirming; Boccaccio says that his youth was marred by errors; Sacchetti, that he lost his temper with men whom he heard murdering his verses as they sang them at their work; Villani, that he was satirical and contemptuous of those who had little philosophy; but even if all these accusations were well-founded, nothing can rob him of his place among the immortals—those, who as Virgil says in the *Æneid*, have earned the grateful remembrance of mankind by their services to the world. It is not as a faultless being that he represents himself, but as a man who had sinned and who found peace through penitence.

And, like all who belong to the company of the immortals, his triumph did not come to him by means of earthly success; his world-wide influence is due—not to the fact that he was an ardent politician and patriot who worked for the establishment of a united State—but to the fact that his dreams were shattered and his plans rendered abortive, and that, an exiled and heart-broken

man, he gathered up his hopes and aims in that poem, which, born of sorrow and despair, was to prove the most powerful factor in the accomplishment of his abandoned design.

The story of his life is a type and symbol of the story of all great endeavour; learning by suffering, victorious by defeat, he reached the climax of his achievement by seeming failure, and the beautiful passage on Death in the *Convivio* seems to convey a foreshadowing of this:

> The noble Soul renders itself unto God and awaits the end of this life with much desire; and to itself it seems that it goes out from the Inn to return home to the Father's mansion; it seems to have reached the end of a long journey and to have reached the City; it seems to have crossed the wide sea and returned into the Port. The noble Soul blesses the time that is past, and it may well bless it; because when Memory turns back to them, the noble Soul remembers her upright deeds, without which it were not possible for her to come to the Port whither she is hastening with such wealth and such gain. And the noble Soul does like the good merchant, who, when he draws near to his Port, examines his cargo, and says, "If I had not passed along such a highway as that, I should not possess this treasure, and I should not have wherewith to rejoice my city to which I am approaching, and therefore he blesses the voyage that he has made."

Dante could not himself fully know how rich a cargo it was that he had brought to port, but we—who measure his work by its ennobling influence through six centuries of time, may indeed bless the voyage that he made in spite of its woes and griefs, and find an echo in our hearts to that fine tribute which Michael Angelo—greatest of Italian sculptors—paid to the greatest of Italian poets:

> He from the world into the blind abyss
> Descended and beheld the realms of woe;
> Then to the seat of everlasting bliss,
> And God's own throne, led by his thought sublime,

Alive he soared, and to our nether clime
Bringing a steady light, to us below
Revealed the secrets of Eternity.
Ill did his thankless countrymen repay
The fine desire; that which the good and great
So often from the insensate many meet,
That evil guerdon did our Dante find.
But gladly would I, to be such as he,
For his hard exile and calamity,
Forego the happiest fortunes of mankind!*

"They know not what they do," are words that may well be applied to Dante's "thankless countrymen," for by driving him into exile they set his feet upon the path of immortality and ensured his future triumph. But the "evil guerdon" that they bestowed upon him has surely been atoned for by the beautiful and historic ceremony that took place in the Baptistery in Florence on the 22nd of April, 1922.

More than six hundred years before, Dante had written in the *Paradiso* (Canto XXV.):

If e'er the sacred poem, that hath made
Both Heaven and earth co-partners in its toil,
And with lean abstinence, through many a year,
Faded my brow, be destined to prevail
Over the cruelty, which bars me forth
Of the fair sheep-fold, where, a sleeping lamb,
The wolves set on and fain had worried me;
With other voice, and fleece of other grain,
I shall forthwith return; and, standing up
At my baptismal font, shall claim the wreath
Due to the poet's temples; for I there
First entered on the faith, which maketh souls
Acceptable to God.

It was from this passage that the idea first came to the *Nazionalisti*, an Association of loyal and patriotic Italians

* Translated by Robert Southey.

928.5 D236w c.1
Whiting, Mary Bradfo 150101 000
Dante the man and the poet.
3 9315 00011726 4
MANCHESTER COLLEGE LIBRARY

928.5
D236w c.2
Whiting
Dante the man and the poet

MAR 25 72
APR 8 72
MAY 20 74
683

DATE DUE
WITHDRAWN
from
Manchester College Library